SON O' FINN
A. E. DAWSON

Enos Dewham

OWNS THIS BOOK

JAN, SON OF FINN

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The Trail

JAN, SON OF FINN

BY

A. J. DAWSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

G. D. ARMOUR

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JAN, SON OF FINN

CHAPTER I

HOW FINN CAME HOME

RIGHTLY to appreciate Jan's character and parts you must understand his origin. For this, you must go back to the greatest of modern Irish wolfhounds, Finn; and to the Lady Desdemona, of whom it was said, by no less an authority than Major Carthwaite, that she was "the most perfectly typical bloodhound of her decade." And that was in the fifteenth month of her age, just six weeks before Finn's arrival at Nuthill.

If you have not forgotten the history of Finn, the wolfhound, you will remember that, in preparing to leave Australia with him, after the great find of opals, the Master said: "It's 'Sussex by the sea' for us, Finn, boy, in another month or so; and, God willing, that's where you shall end your days."

Just fourteen weeks after making that remark (and, too, after a deal more of land and sea travel for Finn than comes into the whole lives of most hounds), the

Master bought Nuthill, the little estate on the lee of the most beautiful of the South Downs from the upper part of which one sees quite easily on a clear day the red chimneys and white gables of the cottage in which Finn was born. But at the time of that important purchase, Finn was lying perdu in quarantine, down in Devonshire; a melancholy period for the wolfhound, that. The Master spent many shipboard hours in discussing this very matter with the Mistress of the Kennels on their passage home from Australia, and he tried hard to find a way out of the difficulty, for Finn's sake. But there it was. You cannot hope to smuggle ashore, even in the most fashionably capacious of lady's muffs, a hound standing thirty-six inches high at the shoulder, and weighing nearer two hundred than one hundred pounds. It was a case of quarantine or perpetual exile, and so Finn went into quarantine. But, as you may guess, there were pretty careful arrangements made for his welfare. Finn's reputation had crossed the seas before him (by submarine cable), and all the world had read of the great wolfhound who, after leading a dingo pack and living in the wild, had saved the Master's life just when that life had become particularly well worth saving, because of the opal discovery.

The wolfhound had special quarters of his own in quarantine, and his enforced stay there had just this advantage about it, that when the great day of his release arrived, there was no more travel and hotel life to be suffered, for by this time the Master was thoroughly settled down at Nuthill, the Mistress of the Kennels had

made that snug place a real home, and her niece, Betty Murdoch, was already an established member of the household. So Finn went straight from quarantine at Plymouth to the best home he had ever known, and to one in which his honoured place was absolutely assured to him.

But it must not be supposed that, because of his much honoured place in the Master's world, Finn had entirely put behind him and forgotten his strange life among the wild kindred in Australia. That could hardly be. The savour of that life would remain for ever in his nostrils, no matter how ordered and humanized his days at Nuthill; just as consciousness of human cruelty, and the torture of imprisonment had been burned into his memory and nature, indelibly as though branded there by the hot irons of the circus folk in New South Wales. Finn adapted himself perfectly to the life of the household at Nuthill, and with ease. Had he not a thousand years of royal breeding in his veins? But he never forgot the wild. He never forgot his days of circus imprisonment as a wild beast. He never for one instant reverted to the gaily credulous attitude toward mankind which had helped the dog-stealers to kidnap him after the first great triumph of his youth, when he defeated all comers, from puppy and novice to full-fledged champion, and carried off the blue riband of his year at the Crystal Palace. Well-mannered he would always be; but in these later days his attitude toward all humans, and most animal folk outside of his own household, was characterized by a gravely alert and watchful kind of reserve. As the

Master once said, in talking on his homeward way to England of that dog-stealing episode of the wolfhound's salad days—

"It would take a tough and wily old thief to tempt Finn across a garden path nowadays, with the best doctored meat ever prepared. And as for really getting away with him—well, they're welcome to try; and I fancy they'd get pretty well all they deserve from old Finn, without the law's assistance."

Betty Murdoch—round-figured, rosy, high spirited, a great lover of out-of-doors, and aged now twenty-two—had been much exercised in her mind as to what Finn would think of her, when he arrived at Nuthill, after the long railway journey from Plymouth. She had seen the wolfhound only once before, when she was somewhat less grown-up, and he was still in puppyhood, before the visit to Australia. The Master, who went specially to Plymouth to fetch Finn, said Betty must expect a certain reserve at first in the wolfhound's attitude.

"He can't possibly remember you, of course, and, nowadays, he is not effusive, not very ready to make new friends."

The Mistress of the Kennels, on the other hand—she still was spoken of as "the Mistress," though at Nuthill there never were any kennels—insisted that Finn would know perfectly well that Betty was one of the family; as, of course, he did. Apart from her physical resemblance to her aunt, Betty had very many of the Mistress's little ways, and especially of her ways in dealing with and thinking of animal folk.

Finn's heart had swelled almost to bursting when the Master came to him in the quarantine station at Plymouth, for, to tell the truth, he never had been able to make head or tail of being left alone in this place, though the Master had tried hard to explain. But he had been well treated there, and was certain the Master would eventually return to him. Yet, when the moment came, there was a sudden overwhelming swelling of his heart which made Finn gasp. He almost staggered as the Master greeted him. The emotion of gladness hurt him, and his dark eyes were flooded. Like a flash, recollection passed through the Master's mind of the tragically beautiful end that came to the life of Tara, Finn's mother. Sudden joy killed that great mother of wolfhound heroes; but then she had not mothered her heroes for nothing. Milk fever had once brought her near to death, and left her big heart permanently weakened. Finn's heart, despite his strange experiences in Australia, was sound as a bell. But all the same, that sudden faintness of joy, and the slight stagger against the Master's knee —it did bring stabbing recollection of Tara's end.

After that there were no further surprises for Finn. Once he had felt the Master's hand burrowing in the wiry grey hair of his neck, Finn knew well that they were homeward bound, that the unaccountable period of separation was over, and that he would very presently see the Mistress of the Kennels; as in fact he did, that very night, at Nuthill by the Downs. And Betty—well, it was perfectly clear to Finn that she was somehow part and parcel with the Mistress; and whilst never now effusive

to anyone, he made it clear at once that he accepted Betty as one of his own little circle of human folk, to be loved and trusted, and never suspected. In the evening the great hound lay extended on the hearthrug of the square, oak-panelled hall at Nuthill. (He occupied a good six feet of rug.) Betty stepped across his shoulders once, to reach matches from the mantel; and Finn never blinked or moved a hair, save that the tip of his long tail just languidly rose twice, ever so gently, slapping the rug. The Master, who was watching, laughed at this.

"You may account yourself an honoured friend already, Betty," he said. "I'll guarantee no other living soul, except the Mistress or I, could step over old Finn like that without his moving. In these days he doesn't unguard to that extent with anyone else."

"Ah, well," laughed Betty; "even less wise dogs than Finn know who loves them—don't they, old man?" Finn blinked a friendly response as she rubbed his ears. But as yet it was not that. Finn had given no thought to Betty's loving him; but he had realized that she was kin to the Mistress and the Master, and therefore, for him, in a category apart from all other folk, animal or human; a person to be trusted absolutely, even by a hound of his unique experience.

CHAPTER II

NUTHILL AND SHAWS

IN a recess beside the hearth in the hall at Nuthill, Finn found an oaken platform, or bench, five feet long by two and a half feet wide. It stood perhaps fifteen inches from the floor, on four stout legs, and its two ends and back had sides eight inches high. The front was open, and the bench itself was covered by a 'possum-skin rug.

"This, my friend, is your own bed," said the Master, when he showed the bench to Finn, after all the household had retired that night. "You've slept hard, old chap, and you've lived hard, in your time; but when you want it, there will always be comfort for you here. But you're free, old chap. You can go wherever you like; still, I'd like you to try this. See! Up, lad!"

Finn sniffed long and interestedly at the 'possum-rug which had often covered the Mistress's feet on board ship and elsewhere. Then he stepped on to the bed and lowered his great bulk gracefully upon it.

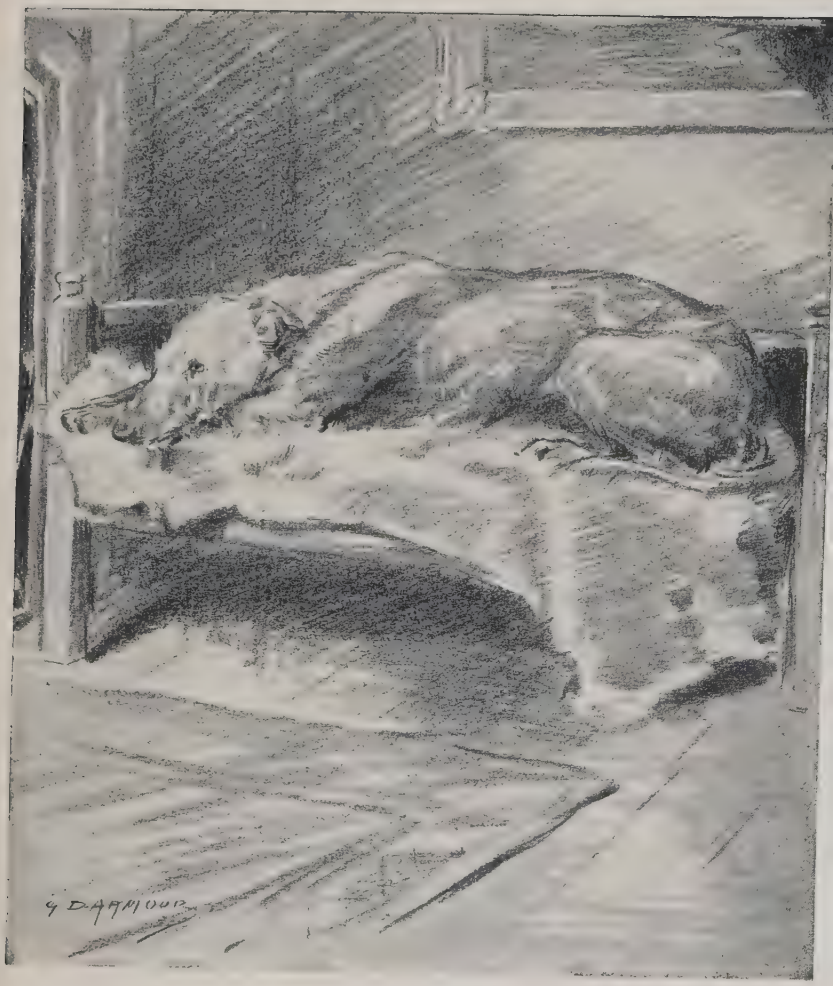
"How's that?" asked the Master. And Finn thrust his muzzle gratefully into the hand he loved. The bed was superlatively good, as a matter of fact. But when, in the quite early morning hours, the Master opened his

bedroom door, bound for the bath, he found Finn dozing restfully on the door-mat.

So that was the end of the hall bed, as a hall bed. That night Finn found it beside the Master's bedroom door; and there in future he slept of a night, when indoors at all. But he was allowed perfect freedom, and there were summer nights he spent in the outer porch and farther afield than that, including the queer little Sussex slab-paved courtyard outside the kitchen door, where he spent the better part of one night on guard over a smelly tramp who, in a moment unlucky for himself, had decided to try his soft and clumsy hand at burglary. The gardener found the poor wretch in the morning aching with cramp and bailed up in a dampish corner by the dust-bin, by a wolfhound who kept just half an inch of white fang exposed, and responded with a truly awe-inspiring throaty snarl to the slightest hint of movement on the tramp's part.

"Six hours 'e's kep' me there, an', bli'me, I'd sooner do six months quod," the weary tramp explained, when the Master had been roused, and Finn called off.

On the morning of his third day at Nuthill it was that Finn first met the Lady Desdemona. And it happened in this wise: Colonel Forde of Shaws, which, as you may know, lies just across the green shoulder of down from Nuthill—its fault is that the house is reached only by the westering sun, while Nuthill's windows catch the first morning rays on one side and hold some of any sunshine there may be the day through—wrote saying that he had heard of Finn's arrival, and would the Mas-



Old Finn

ter come across to luncheon with the Mistress and Miss Murdoch, and bring the wolfhound.

"I hope you will have a look through my kennels with me in the afternoon," added the Colonel; and that was a kind of invitation seldom refused by the Master.

It is, of course, a good many years now since the Shaws kennels first earned the respect of discerning breeders and lovers of bloodhounds. But to this day there is one kind of doggy man (and woman) who smiles a shade disdainfully when Colonel Forde's name is mentioned.

"Very much the amateur," they say. And—"A bit too much of a sentimentalist to be taken seriously," some knowing fellow in a kennel coat of the latest style will tell you. Perhaps they do not quite know what they mean. Or perhaps they are influenced by the known fact that the Colonel has more than once closed his kennel doors to a long string of safe prizes by refusing to exhibit a second time some hound who, on a first showing, has won golden opinions and high awards. But these refusals were never whimsical. They were due always to the Colonel's decision, based upon close and sympathetic observation, that, for the particular hound in question, exhibition represented a painful ordeal.

Among the breeders who at one time or another have visited the Shaws kennels, are a few of the knowing fellows who smile at mention of the Colonel's name. Well, let them smile. It is perhaps as well for them that the Colonel is pretty tolerably indifferent alike to their smiles and to the awards of show judges; for, if Colonel

Forde were seriously bent upon "pot-hunting," there would not be anything like so many "pots" about for other people; and these particular gentry would not at all like that.

"Kennels!" said one of them at a dog show in Brighton, "why, it's more like a kindergarten. There's a sitting-room, a kind of drawing-room, if you'll believe me, in the middle of the kennels, for tea-parties! And as for the dogs, well, they just do whatever they like. As often as not the kennels are empty, except for pups, and the hounds all over the garden and house—a regular kindergarten."

It will be seen then that the Colonel must clearly have merited the disdainful smiles. But I am bound to say I never heard of anyone being bitten or frightened by a dog at Shaws, and it is notorious that, difficult though bloodhound whelps are to rear, the Colonel rarely loses one in a litter. Still, "kindergarten" is certainly a withering epithet in this connection; and one can perfectly understand the professionals' attitude. A sitting-room, nay, worse—"A kind of drawing-room," in the midst of the kennels! Why, it almost suggests that, forgetful of prize-winning, advertising and selling, the Colonel must positively have enjoyed the mere pleasure of spending a leisure hour among his dogs; not at a show or in the public eye, but in the privacy of his own home! Glaring evidence of amateurishness, this. The knowing ones, as usual, were perfectly correct. That is precisely what the Colonel was; a genuine amateur of hounds.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCING THE LADY DESDEMONA

APRIL was uniformly dull and wet that year, but May seemed to bring full summer in her train; and it was on the morning of the third of May that Finn went to Shaws with the Nuthill house party.

The turf of the Downs was so springy on this morning that one felt uplifted by it in walking. Each separate blade of the clover-scented carpet seemed surcharged with young life. The Downland air was as a tonic wine to every creature that breathed it. The joy of the day was voiced in the liquid trilling of two larks that sang far overhead. The place and time gave to the Nuthill party England at her best and sweetest; than which, as the Master often said, the world has nothing more lovely to offer; and he was one who had fared far and wide in other lands.

There is a tiny walled enclosure above the stables at Shaws, once used as a milking yard, and just now a veritable posy of daisies, buttercups, rich green grass and apple blossom. For, in it, there are six or seven gnarled and lichen-grown old apple-trees, whose fruit is of small account, but whose bloom is a gift sent straight from heaven to gladden the hearts of men and beasts, birds and bees. The big double doors in the ivy-grown flint

wall of this enclosure stood wide open. Humming bees sailed booming to and fro, like ships in a tropical trade wind. And through the lattice-work of the grey old apple-trees' branches (so virginally clothed just now) clean English sunshine dappled all the earth and grass in moving chequers of light and shade.

When the Nuthill party looked in through the gates of this delectable pleasaunce, they beheld in its midst the Lady Desdemona, gazing solemnly down her long nose at the moving chequers of sunlight on the grass. Her head was held low—the true bloodhound poise—and that position exaggerated the remarkable wealth of velvety "wrinkle" with which her forehead had been endowed by Nature, after the selective breeding of centuries. Low hung her golden dewlap over the grass at her feet; and all across the satin blackness of her saddle intricately woven little patterns of sunlight flicked back and forth, as the breeze stirred the branches overhead.

"There's all the wisdom and philosophy of the ancients in her face," said the Master, as the beautiful young bloodhound bitch winded them and raised her head.

As a fact, her thought had been far from abstruse. She was merely watching the moving patches of sunlight and, not reflecting upon it as humans do, but feeling the joyousness and beauty of that time and place. She gave no thought to these matters, but was, as it were, inhaling them, and enjoying them profoundly; more profoundly than most men folk would.

Finn eyed her gravely, appraisingly, yet also without thought. He, too, had been unreflectingly absorbing the

beauty of the morning; and now his enjoyment became suddenly narrowed down and concentrated. The rest of the world dropped out of the picture, or rather it became merged for Finn in the picture he beheld of the Lady Desdemona; a study in tawny, orange gold and jetty black, gleaming where the sun touched her and embodying the quintessence of canine health, youth, and high-breeding.

So the world stood still for a moment while all concerned felt, without thought, how good it was. Then her youth and sex spoke in the bloodhound, and Lady Desdemona, head and stern uplifted now, came passaging gaily, proudly forward down the grassy slope to the gateway, entirely ignoring the human people, as was natural, and making direct for Finn, the tallest, most stately representative of her own kind she had ever seen. The Master stepped aside, with a smile, the better to watch the meeting of the hounds. It was worth watching. Till they met, the movement, the provocativeness was all on Lady Desdemona's side; Finn standing erect and still as graven bronze. Then they met, and at a given signal, the tactics of each were sharply reversed. The signal consisted of a little flicking contact, light as thistle-down. As Desdemona curveted down past Finn the tip of her gaily waving tail was allowed once to glance over the Irish Wolfhound's wiry coat; the merest suggestion of a touch. But it seemed this was a magic signal, converting the dancing Desdemona into a graven image, and transforming the statuesque Finn into a hound of abounding and commanding activity.

They made quite a notable picture. The Lady Desdemona stood now, tense, rigid, immobile as any rock, though instinct with life in every hair. Finn became the very personification of action, eager movement, alert interest. Inside of one minute he had examined the motionless Desdemona (by means of the most searchingly concentrated application of his senses of sight and smell) at least as thoroughly as your Harley Street expert examines a patient in half-an-hour. Finn needed no stethoscope to assure him of Desdemona's soundness. But, having seen her in the enclosure, and been interested so far, he now examined her with his keen eyes and nostrils at close quarters, in order that he might know her. And so superior to our own faculties are some of a hound's senses, that at the end of this examination, Finn the wolfhound actually did know Lady Desdemona the bloodhound, quite as thoroughly as humans know anybody after a dozen or so of meetings and much beating of the air in speech.

This process ended, the two hounds turned, and with many friendly nudges and shoulder rubbings, proceeded up the meadow together in the wake of the Nuthill party, towards the house of Shaws. One cannot translate precisely Finn's remark to Desdemona at the end of the examination, but the sense of it was probably something of this sort—

"Yes; you are all right. I like you. Let's be friends."

At all events, there was no doubt whatever Finn did like Desdemona, from that moment; and it was tolerably apparent that she liked the wolfhound. For Finn, feelings

and emotions asserted themselves always in the form of pictures. Up till the time of the meeting with Desdemona, he had not made a dog friend for a long while. In the instant that his eyes first fell upon Desdemona, in the walled enclosure at Shaw's, a picture appeared vividly upon the walls of his brain; the picture of another bitch who had played a notable part in his life and been near and dear to him. But this was not a picture of Warrigal, the dingo slut who had been Finn's mate among the rock foothills of Mount Desolation in Australia. No, Finn's present mental process, whatever it was, skipped that wild period altogether; and the picture that lighted his mind as he gazed with pleasurable interest upon the beautiful Lady Desdemona, was a portrait of Jess, the kangaroo-hound bitch in whose company he had lived and hunted, whose life he had saved when she was attacked by dingoes while lying sorely wounded beside a boundary rider's gunyah in New South Wales. Jess had been Finn's civilized mate, and it was her picture that was flashed into his mind as the effect of his first sight of the Lady Desdemona; a fact which would have flattered the bloodhound could she have known it, for Finn had dearly loved Jess.

CHAPTER IV

THE OPEN-AIR CALL

THAT meeting with Desdemona in the walled enclosure at Shaws was the beginning of many jolly days for Finn. Colonel Forde and his family were both interested and amused by the warm friendship struck up between their beautiful young bloodhound and the famous Finn, with his long record of unique experiences on both sides of the world. Neither hound found any meaning whatever, of course, in the laughing remark made to the Master by Colonel Forde that afternoon, as they strolled round the kennels, followed by the now inseparable Finn and Desdemona. The Colonel paused to lay a hand affectionately on Finn's head, and, with a smile in the Master's direction, he said—

"I suppose it's the old Shakespearean story over again, eh, Finn? Desdemona loves you for the dangers you have passed; is that it? Well, your friendship will have to be strictly platonic, my son, for this particular Desdemona is pledged to no less puissant a prince than Champion Windle Hercules, the greatest bloodhound sire of this age. 'A marriage has been arranged,' as the papers say, Finn; and, all being well, will be consummated before

midsummer, old chap. I hope it won't put your long muzzle too badly out of joint—what?"

The Master laughed, and both men passed on, Finn following cheerfully enough by Desdemona's side; conscious only that the men-folk were talking in friendly, kindly fashion, and recking nothing of the meaning of their words. From his point of view, men-folks use such a mort of words at all times, most of them quite unnecessary, and only a few of them comprehensible. To folk accustomed, like the dog people, to intercourse confined chiefly to looks and movements, the continuous babble of words which humans indulge in is one of their most puzzling attributes. When the Master really wanted Finn to understand anything, the wolfhound very rarely failed him. But Colonel Forde's reference to Othello—well, it was all so much puppy talk, just amiable, meaningless nickering, to Finn and Desdemona.

That evening, while the Master and his folk were dining at Nuthill, Finn arose from a nap in the hall, and, strolling out through the garden, loped easily away across the shoulder of Down betwixt Shaws and Nuthill to visit Desdemona. He found her close to the walled enclosure by the stable, and together they whiled away a couple of evening hours on the springy thyme- and clover-scented turf of the Downs. Just as darkness was taking the place of twilight the scuttering of an over-venturesome rabbit's tail caught Finn's eye, and cost that particular bunny its life. Desdemona, to whom this little event opened up a quite new chapter in life, was hugely excited over the kill, and could hardly allow Finn, with his veteran's skill,

to tear the pelt from the creature's warm body, before she made her first meal of rabbit's hind-quarters.

It was a trivial episode enough, and especially so for a hunter of Finn's experience, who, in his time, had pulled down dozens of old man kangaroos, not to mention the smaller fry of the Australian bush. And yet, though he did not show it as Desdemona did, this trifling incident was of quite epoch-marking importance for Finn, and stirred him profoundly.

"Hullo, old friend! What of the hunting? I declare, you've quite the old bushranging air to-night. Where have you been?" asked the Master, when Finn rejoined his own family circle in the hall at Nuthill, towards bedtime that night. Finn silently nuzzled the under-side of the Master's right wrist; but, though his dark eyes were eloquent, it was beyond him to explain either his doings or his emotions. Yet the Master was not altogether without understanding of these.

"Fact is," he said to Betty Murdoch, as he affectionately rubbed one of Finn's ears, "I believe this old gallant has quite fallen in love with Miss Desdemona, and I could swear he's been hunting in her company to-night. He has all the look of it. I suspect it carries him back to old days, past the quarantine, past even Australia—eh, old chap?—and back to his hunting days about these very Downs, when we were at the cottage, you know. I had to be a great deal in town in those days, before we went to Australia, and Finn ran pretty much wild through his last summer in England."

So the Master did know something of what passed in

the wolfhound's mind, though they had no common language. As a matter of fact, the evening meeting with Desdemona, the frolic on the Downs, and, at last, the running down of that rabbit, had combined to stir Finn more than anything else had stirred him since he had fought for the Master's life in a drought-smitten corner of the bush in Australia. Much that had lain dormant in the great hound since the adventurous days of his leadership of a dingo pack, had waked into active, insistent life that evening, and, brushing aside the habits of a year's soft living, had filled him once more with the keenness of the hunter and the fire of the masterful mate and leader.

It must not be supposed that nostalgia is a modern weakness, or the monopoly of human minds. When Finn looked out across the moonlit Downs that night, while strolling round the house with the Master before going to bed, nostalgia filled his heart to aching point, and clouded his mind with its elusive, tormenting vapours as surely as ever it clouded the brain of any human wanderer. It was the nostalgia of the wilderness, of the life of the wild; and, as he looked out into the moonlight, Finn saw again, in fancy, the boundary-rider's lonely humpy, the rugged, rocky hills of the Tinnaburra; a fleeing wallaby in the distance, himself in hot pursuit. He smelt again the tang of crushed gum-leaves, and heard the fascinating rustle which tells of the movements of game, of live food, over desiccated twigs and leaves, in bush untrodden by human feet.

Yes, Finn tasted to the full that night the nostalgia of

the wilderness. But if it stirred him deeply, it by no means made him unhappy. Across the Down's shoulder there was Desdemona; and he was free, save for the ties of affection—stronger these than any dog-chain—which bound him to the Nuthill folk. And for Desdemona; owing to what many fanciers would have regarded as the reprehensible eccentricity of the owner of Shaws, Desdemona was almost as free as Finn.

CHAPTER V

DESDEMONA LED ASTRAY

A WEEK later, even easy-going Colonel Forde was a little perturbed by the news that Lady Desdemona had been away all night, and that nobody knew of her whereabouts. However, the bitch strolled into the house during the forenoon, looking none the worse for her night out, and, much to his kennelman's annoyance, the Colonel refused to have her confined to the kennels. He did not know that Finn was schooling this blood-royal princess in the ways of the wild; but he could see that she looked fit as a fiddle, and was obviously very much enjoying her life. And so he turned a deaf ear to his kennelman, even when the good fellow said protestingly—

"You don't see such a bitch once in twenty years, sir. She's just on her eighteen month, and might be goin' to Champion Windle most any time now. She's worth taking care of."

"She certainly is, Bates," replied the Colonel, "and you must keep a sharp look-out. Look to her each day. But, upon my word, I think she's also worth giving a good time to. Give her her head, and I don't think she will

ever disappoint us. Thank goodness, there are no traps or poison about here, or none that I ever heard of."

"No, it's not that, sir," persisted the kennelman; "but Desdemona, she's good enough to win in the best company, and to mother winners, too. And you know, sir, if a dog's to do hisself justice on the bench, you can't let him go skirmishing around the country like a gipsy's lurcher. It sorter roughs 'em somehow. The judges don't like it, and the Fancy don't, neither, sir. Look at the chalk an' that on her coat this morning, sir."

"Ah, well," said the Colonel, with a little laugh. "We never have bred for the judges, Bates; nor yet for the Fancy, either; and if they can't recognize the merits of a bitch like that because she's been living a natural, happy sort of life, instead of a cage life—why, then, that's their loss, not ours, and we must chance it."

And so the kennelman shrugged his shoulders, and the Lady Desdemona continued to enjoy life, the new and wider life to which she was being introduced by that hardened wanderer and past-master in the lore of the wild—Finn.

It may be that Colonel Forde himself was more than a little worried about it when, a week later, the young bloodhound disappeared one afternoon, and did not show up again next day. There had been further communications with the house of the redoubtable champion Windle Hercules in Hampshire. The Lady Desdemona's line of travel had been chosen. Bates was to escort her on the nuptial journey, and all arrangements for the wedding of the distinguished pair had been completed. And now—

"Just as if she mighter bin any tramp's cur," as Bates feelingly put it—Desdemona had elected to stray away, and to remain away. And the news from Nuthill showed that—"That there plaguy great wolfhound" was also on the missing list.

On the fourth day of absence, all search having proved unsuccessful, the police were notified. Then, bright and early on the morning of the fifth day, the Lady Desdemona walked quietly up to the kitchen door at Shaws, followed leisurely by Finn, who, after seeing his mate welcomed with some enthusiasm by the cook and several members of her excited staff, turned about and loped easily away in the direction of Nuthill.

But to the experts concerned it speedily became apparent that the alliance with Champion Windle Hercules must be indefinitely postponed. Lady Desdemona would have none of him. It seemed she knew her own mind very well, was perfectly calm and content, but quite determined in her opposition to any hint of matrimonial *pourparlers* with the admitted champion of her race. Bates the kennelman pished and tushed, and thought he knew all about it. The Master felty pretty sure he knew all about it. The Colonel just smiled, and said that Desdemona was young yet, and that, for his part, he always had thought two years a better marrying age than eighteen months.

Meantime, you could not have found a more placidly happy and contented hound in England than the Lady Desdemona; and there were very few days on which she did not meet Finn, either at Nuthill or Shaws.

The beautiful early summer weeks slid by, and the young bloodhound grew more sedate, and less given to violent exercise. And then Bates succeeded in persuading the Colonel into allowing him to kennel the Lady Desdemona. It is true the kennel given her was pretty nearly the size of a horse's loose box, and had a little covered outside yard of its own. But it was a kennel, and securely enclosed. Despite the watchfulness of Bates, Finn the wolfhound came nuzzling round its sides fairly often in search of the prisoner.

After four days of confinement the bitch was released by Colonel Forde's orders. For two days she had taken no food; and as she obviously fretted when Finn was kept away from her, the wolfhound was allowed to come and go at Shaws as he chose, and as he did at Nuthill.

Thus a week passed, and it was seen that the Lady Desdemona grew restless and uneasy.

"Take my advice, and leave them severely alone," said the Master. "Finn will go his own way whether we like it or not. He's too old a hand to be cajoled, and I've sworn I'll never coerce him. The bitch will be better left to go her own way. She's got a good mate."

Bates sighed, but the Colonel agreed; and very little was said about it when, a few days later, Desdemona passed out beyond the ken of her friends at Shaws and Nuthill, and for the time was seen no more.

What did rather surprise the Master, however, was that after an absence of a few hours, on the day of Desdemona's disappearance, Finn turned up as usual in the evening at Nuthill, and spent the night on his own bed.

This fact did strike the Master as odd when he heard that nothing had been seen at Shaws of the bloodhound.

"Evidently, then, Finn has nothing to do with her disappearance," said Colonel Forde next day.

"Ah!" replied the Master musingly. "I wonder!" And he thoughtfully pulled Finn's ears, as though he thought this might extract information regarding the whereabouts of Desdemona. But Finn, as his way was, said nothing. He maintained in this matter a policy of masterly reserve.

CHAPTER VI

HOW DESDEMONA FOUND HER NEST

IT would, of course, be highly interesting if one were able to map out precisely the effect produced in Desdemona's mind by the influence of Finn the wolfhound. One would very much like to trace the mental process; to know exactly how much and in what manner the influence of the wolfhound, with his experiences of life among the wild kindred of Australia, affected the development of the highly domesticated, the thoroughly sophisticated, young bloodhound. This one cannot pretend to do. But, as it happens, one is able faithfully to record the Lady Desdemona's actions and experiences; and from that record, in the light of her previous intercourse with the Irish wolfhound, one is free to draw one's own conclusions as to motives and inspirations.

During the course of their various absences from Shaws and Nuthill, Finn and the Lady Desdemona very thoroughly scoured the South Downs within a radius of a dozen miles from home. In the beginning of their longest jaunt, which kept the pair of them five days away, Desdemona made a discovery that greatly interested both of them.

It happened that Finn ran down and killed a rabbit,

rather perhaps, from lightness of heart, or by way of displaying his powers to Desdemona, than from any desire for food. And so it fell out that, having slain the bunny, the hunter and his mate proceeded to amuse themselves in the vicinity, leaving the rabbit lying where it had received its *coup de grâce,* at the foot of a stunted, wind-twisted thorn-bush.

It might have been an hour later when (with appetites whetted, no doubt, by exercise in the finest air to be found in southern England) Finn and Desdemona forsook their play and made for the thorn-bush, with a view to a cold rabbit supper. But a glance at the spot showed that the very thoroughly killed rabbit was no longer there. Finn's eyes blazed for a moment with the sort of masterful wrath he had not shown since his dingo-leading days in the Tinnaburra. Desdemona noticed this exhibition of lordly anger and thought it rather fine. But, being female, she was more practical than Finn; and being a bloodhound, she had a sense of smell by comparison with which Finn's scenting powers were as nought—a mere gap in his equipment; and this, despite the fact that the training his wild life had given him in this respect placed him far ahead of the average wolfhound. But by comparison with bloodhounds, the fleet dogs who hunt by sight and speed—deerhounds, greyhounds, Irish wolfhounds and the like—have very little sense of smell.

Now the Lady Desdemona, having no experience of wild life, did not know in the least what had become of that rabbit. She formed no conclusions whatever about it. But obeying one of her strongest instincts, she picked up

a trail leading in the direction opposite to that from which Finn had overtaken the bunny; and, with one glance of encouragement over her shoulder at Finn, began to follow this up at a loping trot. As she ran, her delicate, golden-coloured flews skimmed the ground; her sensitive nostrils questioned almost every blade of grass, her brain automatically registering every particle of information so obtained, and guiding her feet accordingly. Her strong tail waved above and behind her in the curve of an Arab scimitar. She ceased to be the Lady Desdemona and became simply a bloodhound at work; an epitome of the whole complex science of tracking. Finn trotted admiringly beside her, his muzzle never passing her shoulder; and now and again when he happened to lower his head from its accustomed three-foot level, his nostrils caught a whiff or two of something reminiscent of long-past hunting excursions when he was barely out of puppyhood.

The dog-folk are not greatly given to discussion. It was obvious that Desdemona had some purpose earnestly in view. (As a fact, she herself did not as yet know what that purpose was.) And that was enough for Finn. The bloodhound's pace was slow, and Finn could have kept up this sort of travelling for a dozen hours on end without really exerting himself.

But this was not to be a long trail as the event proved, though it was mostly uphill. Before a mile and a half had been covered, Desdemona began to show excitement and emitted a single deep bay, mellow as the note of an organ. Finn remarked her fine voice with sincere approval. Like

all hounds he detested a sharp, high, or yapping cry. A few seconds later, Desdemona came to a standstill beside the stem of a starveling yew-tree, and just below the crest of the Down. Her muzzle was thrust into an opening in the steep side of the Down, over which there hung a thatch of furze. But though her head entered the opening, her shoulders could not pass it, and there was wrath and excitement in the belling note she struck as she drew back.

This was Finn's opportunity, and stepping forward, he attacked the overhanging furze and stony chalky earth with both his powerful fore feet. He had winded now a scent that roused him; and what is more, he remembered precisely what that twangy, acrid scent betokened. The chalky earth flew from under his great paws, faster than two men could have shifted it with mattocks; and, as the shelving crust was thin, it took him no more than one or two minutes to make an opening through which even his great bulk could pass with a little stooping.

Another moment and Desdemona had forced her way past Finn, baying hoarsely, and was inside the cave. There followed a yowling, snarling cry, a scuffling sound, and a big red fox emerged, low to the ground like a cat, his brush between his legs, fight in his bared jaws, and flight in his red rolling eyes. But Fate had knocked at Reynard's door, and would not be denied. His running did not carry him far. It is probably somewhat disturbing to be rooted out of one's own particular sanctuary by a baying bloodhound. But it is worse to find at one's front-door a vision of vengeance and destruction in the

shape of a giant Irish wolfhound, whose kill one has purloined.

In Finn's salad days it might have meant a fight. As things were, it was rather an execution; and though the fox died snapping, his neck was broken before he had decided upon his line of action. As Finn flung the furry corpse aside, Desdemona appeared in the mouth of the cave with most of the stolen rabbit between her jaws. It was noteworthy that she gave no heed at all to the fox. Her business as a tracker had been with her mate's stolen kill. In the absence of Finn, Reynard would have paid no other penalty for his theft than the loss of the rabbit. As it was the incident cost him his life; and he was a master fox, too, who had ranged that countryside with considerable insolence for some years; a terribly familiar foe in a number of neighbouring farmyards.

Neither Finn nor Desdemona ate the remains of that rabbit. For one thing, they were not yet really hungry, and for another thing they did not relish the musky tang left by Reynard's jaws. Apart from this (and despite its strong scent) they were both keenly interested in the cave which had been Reynard's home; especially Desdemona.

It seemed the bloodhound would never tire of investigating the cave; once she had satisfied herself as to Finn fully understanding that she, alone, unaided, and with most complete success, had tracked down and retrieved the stolen rabbit. This fact had to be clearly appreciated before Desdemona could bring herself to lay aside the mangled rabbit. Then she invited Finn's attention to the

interior of the cave. Together they explored its resources till Finn felt almost nauseated by the smell of fox which filled the place. But Desdemona, with her far more delicate sense of smell, seemed quite unaffected by this. To and fro she padded, closely examining every inch of the place, and dragging out into the open scores of bones and other oddments which told of its long occupancy.

It really was a rather fascinating lair, despite its musky smell; and its position was superb. Being on a southern slope, and just below the crest of the highest point of Downs thereabouts, one plainly saw the sparkle of sunlight on the waters of the Channel from the mouth of this cave. On the other hand, an obliging cup-shaped hollow of the Downs, some hundred yards away to the west, gave one a vista of Sussex farm-lands extending over scores of miles; a view that many a caveless millionaire would give a fortune to secure for his home.

Again, the extreme steepness of the particular little spur, or swelling of the Downs, in which this cave had been formed, made it highly improbable that the feet of man would ever come that way. The surrounding turf had doubtless known the sharp little feet of many hundreds of generations of sheep; but it had never known the plough. It was the same unbroken turf which our early British ancestors knew in these parts, and had remained unscathed by any such trifling happenings as the Roman invasion, the Fire of London, the Wars of the Roses, or the advent of Mr. Lloyd George. The very cave itself may easily have been older than Westminster Abbey; and if there is a lord in the land whose ancestral

hall can boast a longer record of un-"restored" antiquity, he may fairly claim that his forebears built most superlatively well.

At all events the place appealed most strongly to the Lady Desdemona, and since her heart seemed set upon it, Finn cheerfully endeavoured to forget the foxy smell, busied himself in securing a fresh rabbit for supper, and generally behaved as a good mate should in the matter of helping to make a new home. And that is the plain truth in the matter of how Desdemona found her cave.

CHAPTER VII

DESDEMONA FORGETS HER MANNERS

IT has been recorded that, as the weeks slipped by after Desdemona's first little term of absence from her home at Shaws, she grew daily more sedate in her manner and less given to the irresponsible activities of hound youth.

It was also noticed that she developed a habit of carrying off all her best bones, or other solid comestibles, instead of dispatching them beside her dish as her sophisticated habit had always been. What was not known, even to the astute Bates, was that the most of such eatables were laboriously carried over close upon four miles of downland by the Lady Desdemona, for ultimate storage in her cave, where, a little reluctantly, she devoured some of them and stowed away others to be more or less devoured by insects, and, it may be, by prowling stoats and other vermin, during the bloodhound's periods of residence in her own proper home.

Finn accompanied his mate, as a matter of course, upon most of her pilgrimages to the cave. But, somewhat to his chagrin, he found, as time went on, that Desdemona became less and less keen upon his company. Latterly, in fact, she came as near as so courtly a creature could to

sending him about his business flatly, and she formed a habit of lying across the mouth of her cave in a manner which certainly suggested that she grudged Finn entry to the old place; a thing which ruffled him more than he cared to admit.

As a matter of fact the Lady Desdemona had not the faintest idea why she should adopt this tone and manner towards her mate. She admired Finn as much as ever; she liked him well, and had no shadow of a reason for mistrusting him. But she had her own weird to dree; and inherited memories and instincts far stronger than any wish or inclination of her daily life, were just now dominating her utterly.

She was full of vague anxiousness; a sense of impending difficulties; a blind but undeniable determination to be forearmed against she knew not what dangers and needs. And among other things, other vague instincts the which she must obey with or without understanding, there was the desire to store up food, and to preserve intact her sole command of the privacy of her cave. If Finn had been human, he would have shrugged his shoulders, and in private given vent to generalizations regarding the inscrutability of females. As it was, he very likely shrugged his great grey shoulders, but went his way without remark.

Then came the day upon which Desdemona disappeared from Shaws, and Finn, to the Master's surprise, slept in his own proper bed at Nuthill.

The fact was he had parted with Desdemona that evening under rather painful circumstances. In the early

evening he had journeyed with her to the cave—she carrying a large mutton-bone which she made no pretence of offering to share with her mate—and her attitude throughout had been one of really unaccountable chilliness and reserve. They had drunk together—the cold nectar of a prehistoric dew-pond that lay within a hundred yards of the cave—and Desdemona had turned away curtly and hurried back to the cave, with never a lick or a look in Finn's direction; as though she feared he might take the place away in his teeth. Finn had noticed that she moved wearily, as though action taxed her strength; yet he thought her unaccountably ready to walk away from him.

He ran down a rabbit for his mate, and deposited it before her at the cave's mouth in the most friendly manner. Then, before he could get time to tear the pelt off for her, the Lady Desdemona, with a snappishness more suggestive of a hedgeside cur than of a hound of her rank, actually snatched away the rabbit, and with never a "Thank you," or a "By your leave," carried it right inside the cave, dropping it there and returning to bar the entrance, with a look in her red-hawed eyes, and a lift of her golden flews, which, if not actual snarling, was, as folks say, near enough to make no difference. At least it very plainly told Finn he was not wanted there; and the limits of his punctilious courtesy having now been passed, he had turned away without look or sound, and descended the Down in high dudgeon.

It was clear to Finn that his mate needed a lesson in manners, and so, moodily, he stalked away and went hungry to bed like the illogical male creature he was,

vaguely surmising that in his discomfort there must be something of retribution for Desdemona. Had he but known it, he had a long line of human precedents in the matter of this particular piece of foolishness; even to the detail of the untasted dinner-dish which he left in the back porch when he went to bed at Nuthill.

CHAPTER VIII

FINN IS ENLIGHTENED

NEXT morning courtesy demanded that Finn should accept Betty Murdoch's invitation to accompany her on a rather long walk. She had bills to pay and calls to make in the village. Finn went, of course, stalking silently beside pretty, cheery Betty. But he made a poor companion, and Betty even told the Master at luncheon that she thought Finn was not very well, so dull and uninterested in anything he had appeared all the morning.

"H'm! I suspect he misses Lady Desdemona," said the Master. "Puzzling thing, that. I can't make out why they're not together."

The fact was, Finn found the nursing of his offended dignity a wearisome task. It was all very well to rebuke Desdemona by ignoring her existence; but could he be quite sure that she noticed his absence, or cared about it? And in any case, whether or not it affected her, it certainly bored him very much. He missed greatly the companionship of his mate, and not a bit the less because she had been so rude to him the day before.

The upshot of it was that, after disposing of a good portion of the dinner placed in his big dish at six o'clock

that evening (in the little courtyard in which he had once held a tramp bailed up all night), he picked up the large, succulent, and still decently covered knuckle-bone designed for his dessert, and, carrying this in his mouth, set out for the cave on the Downs. He probably had some small twinges of misgiving, but endeavoured to dismiss these by assuring himself that poor Desdemona was no doubt very sorry for her ill temper of the previous day; that she doubtless was feeling his protracted absence keenly, and it would be only courteous and fair now to let bygones be bygones, and present her with a really choice knuckle-bone by way of proving his forgiveness.

This was more or less the way in which the wolfhound's mind worked, as he ambled over the Downs that evening with his big knuckle-bone. (The cook at Nuthill was one of Finn's most devoted admirers. In addition to the appetizing golden-brown skin that coated it, this bone carried quite a good deal of the short, dark-coloured sort of meat which, though devoid of juice, makes very agreeable eating, and lends itself well to canine mastication.) And in view of this attitude of mind of his, Finn was rather grievously disappointed by the result of his visit.

He found the Lady Desdemona uneasily prowling back and forth, and in and out of the entrance to her cave. She perfunctorily touched Finn's nose with her own (rather rough and hot) muzzle in greeting, and accepting the knuckle-bone with somewhat unmannerly eagerness, carried it at once to the rear of the cave. But when

Finn made to follow her, she returned nervously to the mouth of the cave and stood there, blocking the entrance. Most strangely stiff, preoccupied, and ill at ease, Finn thought her.

"Glad to see you, and all that," her manner suggested; "but I don't much think you'd better stay. I'm—er—busy, and—er—don't let me detain you here."

That was the suggestion conveyed; and Finn would have been the more angered about it, but for a vague feeling he had which he could in no way account for: a sort of yearning desire to help his mate and do something for her.

"She certainly doesn't seem to want me," he thought. And he tried to brace himself by means of resentful recollection of the eager way she had taken the bone he brought her. But much as he would have preferred to sniff, look coldly down his muzzle and walk off, he found himself licking one of Desdemona's heavily pendulous ears in quite a humble and solicitous manner. It was really rather annoying.

She jerked herself nervously away from him, with no more of deference than she might have shown some too effusive and presumptuous puppy. And yet, and yet the great wolfhound's bowels yearned in kindliness toward this ungracious bloodhound mate of his; and when he did finally accept her numerous hints and take his leave, it was with no thought of resentment in his mind, but, on the contrary, with many a backward glance over his wire-coated shoulder, and several low whines of farewell from deep down in his throat. Altogether the eve-

ning, like the day preceding it, was a depressing one for Finn, and he was not sorry when the time came to stretch his great length upon his bed by the door of the Master's room and sleep.

But when morning arrived Finn surprised his friend the cook by not waiting for his customary dish of milk. Directly the back door was opened he slipped out into the sweet, early sunshine of that fragrant neighbourhood, and was off at a good loping gait for the Downs. (It was a thousand pities he could not have carried his milk with him as a morning draught for Desdemona.)

There was no sign of the bloodhound near the mouth of the cave when Finn breasted the steep rise it faced. But as he drew nearer there came sounds from out the cave which, whilst altogether bewildering in themselves, did at least indicate Desdemona's presence there. The first sound to reach him was a hoarse and threatening growl, a quite unmistakably minatory growl, from the throat of his own mate as she got her first wind of his, Finn's, approach to the cave he had helped to make a home. Finn paused for a moment, head raised and ears cocked, to consider this truly remarkable manifestation. And as he listened, there issued from the den other small sounds of a totally different kind: mild, twittering little bleatings; several voices, each weak and thin, and in some subtle way most curiously appealing to the wolfhound.

Then, in one flash of memory and reason, came vivid understanding of the whole business; as usual, in the form of a picture. Finn saw again, from that sun-washed Eng-

lish hillside, the gaunt, bald foothills around Mount Desolation. He saw the heat shimmering above the scorched rocks on which he slew Lupus in open fight, and witnessed the terrible disintegration of that fighter's redoubtable sire, Tasman, under the foaming jaws and flashing feet of his own dingo mate, Warrigal. But the picture did not show Finn any fighting. It showed himself, at the den's mouth, gazing in upon Warrigal, and Warrigal's curved flank supporting a little bunch of wolfhound-dingo pups, helpless, blind, new-born, and cheeping thinly like caged birds. Again came the sound of the small bleatings from the cave on the South Downs. The Australian picture faded out from Finn's excited mind, its task accomplished. He knew now; and into the gentle whining which escaped his throat as he stepped forward to the cave's entrance Finn introduced a note of reassurance and soothing understanding which even human ears would have comprehended and been satisfied by.

"All right, my mate," said Finn's gentle whining. "I know, I know. I'll be very careful."

And then came Desdemona's answer as Finn's great bulk blocked the entrance. This time her voice struck a note quite new to her. She understood now that Finn understood; she knew she was not to be called upon to shield that which she cherished in the cave there from immediate peril. There was rest and thankfulness in Desdemona's voice now; but withal, as Finn entered, there was more.

"Oh, please be very careful! Be very careful!" said her whine, as her swimming eyes, with their deep-pouched

crimson haws, looked up at Finn. It would have been hard for Desdemona if she had been obliged now to take the defensive, for Finn found the beautiful bitch most utterly exhausted. But, as he well knew, it had gone hardly, too, with the man or beast who should have forced the Lady Desdemona to her defence. Weak and exhausted though she clearly was, the mother-passion looked out from her brimming eyes, and the call of need would have found her a living flame for valour, a most deadly force in a fight.

"All right! All right! Don't stir, my mate," said Finn's low whine. And then he entered the cave and gazed down upon the miracle the night had brought. Five sleek-sided puppies nestled in a row within the Lady Desdemona's carefully curved flank. They were so new to the world as to be no more than a few hours' old; they were blind and helpless as stranded jelly-fish. But they were vigorously breakfasting, none the less; and as Finn gazed down upon them from his three-foot height, their mother proceeded to wash and groom their fat bodies for the twentieth time that morning, interrupting herself from time to time to glance proudly up into her mate's face, as who should say—

"See what I have given you! Now you understand. These, my lord, are princes of your royal blood and mine."

Neither she nor Finn could realize, of course, just why these children of their union—their lamentable *mésalliance,* as the fanciers would have said—were the first of their kind the world had ever seen: the offspring of an

Desdemona and the Puppies

Irish wolfhound champion and a daughter of generations of bloodhound champions. But to Desdemona it was clear enough that a miracle unique in history had occurred; and as for Finn, he looked and looked, and his bowels yearned over the group at his feet even more mightily than over Desdemona his mate on the previous evening. Here certainly was food for wonder and astonishment. Two dog people had met outside this lonely cave the night before; and here there were seven. The newcomers were, with one exception, black and golden brown in colour, like their mother; yet their short coats were sensibly different from hers in texture. The exception was black as to his saddle and head, but iron-grey for the rest, a blend one sometimes sees in otter-hounds. And Finn noticed that this exception was somewhat larger than either of his four brothers and sisters. (Two of them were brothers, and two sisters; the black and grey fellow was a brother.)

Finn gently licked the round back of one of the pups. A moment before Desdemona's tongue had crossed the same fat back. Yet its blind little owner whimpered instant complaint at the very gentle touch of Finn's tongue.

"Be very careful!" whined the mother.

So Finn turned to the bigger pup, the black and grey, and licked him carefully. There was no sign of a whimper from this sturdy chap. On the contrary, he wriggled over on his round back and presented his equally round, grey belly for the same treatment. So Finn gravely licked his largest son all over in the approved maternal fashion, while Desdemona looked on with a quaint mixture of ex-

pressions in her pain-drawn eyes. The mixture was of pride and jealousy, approval and solicitude, motherhood and matehood—quite a curious little study in expressions.

And then came an odd, rather touching little incident. Using infinite care to avoid disturbing or unsettling her full-fed little ones, the bloodhound mother slowly, gently, and with much effort, raised her aching body from the ground and stood a moment tremulously resting. Then she nudged Finn with her nose, and gently, but quickly, nervously, edged him out to the mouth of the cave. There the appeal of her liquid eyes, no less than the meaning little whine which escaped her, said plainly—

"Don't go inside! Stay there, on guard!"

And with a rush (despite her pain-racked state) Desdemona ran down the slope in obedience to an imperative natural call. A few seconds later and she stood drinking eagerly, quickly, beside the dewpond. But for all her haste and her parched throat and aching body, the mother bitch was careful not to wet her coat, since that might have made their bed chilly for the pups. Returning hot foot, she found Finn immovable beside the mouth of the cave, a formidable sentry.

But while yet distant some ten or twelve yards, Desdemona heard a whimper from within-sides (doubtless a pup had turned over on its back and forgotten how to roll round again); and accordingly her weary limbs must lift her up the steep slope almost at a bound, leaving her no time for thanks to Finn, and care for nothing but her little ones.

To see her lower herself again to make of her aching

body a nest and bulwark for the pups was to see a really beautiful study of animal motherhood. The deep wrinkles of her long forehead were all twisted from the pains of the night; but not by one hair's breadth did she miscalculate the place for her descent to earth, or the nice disposition of her body to secure the maximum of comfort and shelter for her brood.

If her mate looked for any companionable attention now, he looked in vain. Each of the five young ones must be scrupulously washed and groomed once more to make up for the neglect of the past few minutes. And by that time they were greedily pounding at her dugs for another meal. However, Finn understood now; and as sentry he spent the rest of the forenoon by the cave.

CHAPTER IX

THE LONE MOTHER

THROUGH many, many generations past the forebears of the Lady Desdemona had been wont at all such crises in their lives as she was now experiencing to receive the closest and most unremitting human care and supervision. In the Shaws breeding kennels, for example, there would always be at such times an abundance of fresh warm milk, clean, warm bedding for the new arrivals and their mother, and every other sort of comfort and attention which men-folk have devised for the benefit of the aristocrats among dog-folk.

Thus, if the alliance between the Lady Desdemona and the great champion of her race, Windle Hercules, had been consummated, a foster-mother would have been held in readiness to share the task of nursing her family when it came. Two or three pups would have been left with Desdemona; the others would have been taught to derive their nutriment and nursing from some plebeian little shepherd bitch, specially bereaved of her own offspring for this purpose. But in the cave on the Downs, and in the aftermath of the runaway match of Finn and Desdemona, no human eye saw Desdemona's family, and no human care played any part in its rearing. Now, since

we are all, in greater or lesser measure, the product of our respective environments, and as for centuries before her time Desdemona's ancestors had been accustomed to the fostering care of human kind, she and her family must have been profoundly affected by the peculiar circumstances of her first maternal experiences.

It did not take long for Finn to realize that his mate attached more importance than she ever had before to the food-supply question. It was easy to bring her a bone from his own daily supply at Nuthill, though that did involve carrying the bone over four or five miles of Downs. But, as was natural, Desdemona wanted more than bones. It was not for nothing that five little mouths (armed with teeth like pin-points) tugged and pounded at her dugs by day and by night. Whenever Finn thought of it, he would run down and kill a rabbit for his mate, and for these the bloodhound was duly grateful. But dogs do not discuss such needs. Finn himself was well fed each day at Nuthill, as a matter of course. Frequently though he visited the Down-ridge cave, he did not live there, and being still attached to a regular man-made home, he never adopted any set hunting routine, any more than he reverted to any other among the habits of wild life. He did not reason with himself regarding Desdemona's position or needs. When he thought of it, he gave her food; but these thoughts of his were, quite naturally, less frequent than the recurrence of Desdemona's conscious needs, underlined and emphasized as these were by the tireless assertiveness of her five children.

One result was that, within three days of the arrival of the puppies, Desdemona was doing a certain amount of hunting on her own account, especially in the seasons of twilight, both morning and evening. In her movements she was, of course, infinitely slower than her wolfhound mate. He could easily have run circles round her when she was travelling at her fastest. Her sense of smell and tracking ability were immeasurably ahead of Finn's powers in these directions, and in some countries this would have stood her in good stead. It was no very great help to her, however, in rabbit hunting; and many a long and patient tracking ended for Desdemona in nothing more nutritious than a view of her intended quarry disappearing into the security of its earth or burrow, while the hungry hunter was still twenty paces distant. Then, perforce, poor Desdemona would hurry back to her nursing, hungry as when she left it.

If Finn should arrive with food on such an evening or morning, so much the better. If not—well, Desdemona gave herself utterly to her puppies. There was no thought of grievance or complaint in her mind, but only the earnest endeavour to satisfy, so far as she was able, all the calls of her little blind tyrants. Her will to succeed as a mother was at least equal to that which any creature of the wild could have known. But her powers of contrivance, her cunning, endurance, and, in short, her command of success, in conditions approximating to those of motherhood in the wild, were necessarily not equal to those of wild-born folk.

For the first time in her life the Lady Desdemona was

now living hardly, but it must not be supposed that this meant unhappiness for her. That would be far from the truth. The modern hound's sophisticated ancestry is almost as ancient as that of men-folk; but withal he remains very much nearer in every way to the life of the wild, and can revert to it with far more ease. There are penalties attaching to the process, however, and even at the time her puppies were born the Lady Desdemona had grown noticeably less sleek than her habit had been at Shaws; just as even a few days of unsheltered life in the woods—nay, even twenty-four hours without a bedroom—will make a man or woman notably less sleek.

The fact was that, upon her present diet at all events, the young bloodhound was not quite equal to the task of nourishing five puppies. No doubt Nature—whose wisdom so often is mistaken for ruthlessness by pessimistically inclined observers of the surfaces of things—had a watchful eye upon Desdemona in her cave.

On the morning of the fifth day of the puppies' lives Desdemona was out and about before the sun, and her hunting took her somewhat far afield. While she hunted —doubtless introducing fear into several rabbit earths, and tragedy into one—Destiny came knocking at the door of her own cave, and left his sign manual there in letters of blood. On her homeward way, the half of a young rabbit gripped between her jaws, Desdemona suddenly picked up a fresh trail close to the cave. In the same instant the half rabbit fell from her parted jaws, and her nose went to earth, while premonition of disaster smote

at her heart, and all the channelled lines of her forehead deepened.

A few urgent bounds carried her to the mouth of the cave. Two more steps, and the events of the last half-hour lay plain before her eyes. Two of her puppies lay dead, and in the throat of one of them there still were fastened the teeth of their slayer: a full-grown, tawny-coated stoat. The blood-drinking stoat was of no greater length than one of Desdemona's low-hanging ears, yet without the smallest flicker of hesitation the terrible little beast wheeled about to attack the bereaved mother of his quarry. With bared fangs—flecked now with blood—the stoat crouched, breathing quite fearless defiance.

For the moment Desdemona gave no thought to the stoat, but lowered her massive head to the inspection of the dead puppy which lay nearest. In that moment the fearless stoat saw his chance. Brave though he was—and no creature is more brave—the stoat did not court death; and so, like a yellow snake he slid out of the cave and down the steep slope beyond. But, being fearless, he halted when he came to the remains of Desdemona's rabbit. Fresh-killed meat was something he could not pass, even though the investigation should cost him his life.

In the cave, a very few seconds showed Desdemona that two of her pups were dead. A frantically hurried licking sufficed to assure her that the remaining three were unhurt. And then, the fire of judgment in her red-brown eyes, she swept out from the cave on the trail of her enemy. In three bounds she reached the stoat, who was perfectly prepared now to fight an elephant for pos-

session of the half rabbit he had found. The tiny creature did, as a fact, draw blood, with one slashing bite, from Desdemona's muzzle. And then he died (snarling defiance), his spine smashed through in two places between the bloodhound's powerful jaws.

Without a moment's pause, after completing this act of vengeance, Desdemona hurried back to her young. With a fine effort of will she ignored the two corpses, and settled herself down, as though thoroughly at ease in mind and body, to the task of suckling her three remaining youngsters. It is worth noting that, whereas a tithe of the strain and shock she had sustained during the past hour would have made worse than useless the ministrations of a human nursing mother, there was no fault in the quality of this particular meal taken by the puppies, nor any momentary imperfection about the manner in which it was made available to them, or the way in which they were washed and groomed after it, and disposed for their nap.

That Desdemona was none the less acutely conscious of her bereavement is proved by the fact that, so soon as her three full-fed pups were asleep, she rose very deftly and carefully, and drew out to the mouth of the cave the body of the puppy at whose throat she had found the stoat. Depositing the limp little body upon the chalky ledge before the cave, Desdemona regarded it mournfully, sitting on her hauches the while, her muzzle pointing earthward, her splendid brow deeply wrinkled —a true bloodhound.

After a few minutes given to sad contemplation she

went inside again, and carried out the other little corpse, laying it nearby its fellow and nosing it sadly, till the two were touching. There was another interval of melancholy contemplation. And then, suddenly lifting her muzzle heavenward, so that its deep flews swayed in the breeze, Desdemona broke into vocal mourning, in a long, deep, baying howl; a less eerie sound, perhaps, than the siren-like howl of an Irish wolfhound in distress, yet withal, in its different, deeper, more resonant way, a cry quite equally impressive.

It was at this employ that Finn found his mate, when he arrived at the cave that morning from Nuthill. For some moments Finn also gazed down at the victims, pondering over their immobility and his mate's mournful cries. Then, very tenderly at first, he muzzled the dead puppies. That process flashed a picture into his mind, and he saw again Warrigal's dead children in the Mount Desolation cave. So he understood. His head moved now far more vigorously, almost roughly, indeed, as he pushed the little bodies forward with his nose, thrusting them out upon the turf, so that they rolled, one over the other, down the steep part of the slope.

Then Finn turned to his mate and affectionately licked her low-hanging ears, flews and dewlap. It was perfectly obvious that he understood her grief and sought to assuage it. Finding that she paid no heed to him, Finn turned from her gravely, and walked within to where the three remaining pups lay. Carefully he licked the big black-and-grey dog pup. Still Desdemona remained outside. So Finn proceeded to lick one of the other pups, the weakling

of the group. This produced at once a faint whimpering from the puppy, and that brought her mother quickly to her side. Standing aside now, Finn watched the bloodhound settle herself down to the task of nursing. Contented then, he walked to the mouth of the cave and lay down there, gazing out reflectively across the green ridge to the far-off Sussex weald.

It is easy for scientists to affirm that dogs cannot think. Call the process what one may, Finn saw and understood his mate's grief. He recognized that he could not give her comfort. He knew that, if Desdemona would not answer to a call from him, she would respond immediately to the claims of her offspring, and to her offspring he led her. This is what actually occurred, and no matter what the theorists may say in their learned generalizations, the rest of us are free to draw our own conclusions.

What happened was that Finn led his mate from the abandonment of her lonely mourning to renewed absorption in her motherly duties. It is true enough that nature was at work on Finn's side in this matter, and without the wolfhound's aid would presently have achieved the same result. But Finn assisted and hastened the process; and is that not as much as one can often say of the high task of the physician?

CHAPTER X

FAMILY LIFE—AND DEATH

IN the very early morning of their ninth day in the world, one of Desdemona's three pups died—it was the weakling sister—and the eyes of the big black-and-grey dog pup began to open. It seemed he had absorbed all the strength of his weakling sister to add to his own, and as is so often the case with the largest pup of a litter, he thrived apace; growing almost visibly, "like a weed," as the breeders say.

Desdemona paid very little heed to the puppy that died. Had it been a human child, skilled nurture would likely have sustained its weakling life, possibly for many years. But it was not part of Nature's plan that any of the bloodhound mother's energies should be wasted over the weakling of her little brood. The race is to the swift in Nature's scheme. The black-and-grey pup always secured the most warmth, because he burrowed forcibly under his brothers and sisters. He secured the lion's share of nutriment, because he was strong enough to force his way from teat to teat, ousting all other comers, till his lusty appetite was satisfied. He secured the most of his mother's attention, partly because of his ability and

will to thrust himself to the fore at all times, and, partly, it may be, by compelling her prideful admiration.

When Finn found the little dead body he silently nosed and drew it out from the cave. Out there on the open turf of the down, Nature would see speedily to its sepulture, for Nature employs many grave-diggers and suffers no unseemly waste. She works on a huge scale, but only the superficial see wastefulness in Nature's plans.

So now Desdemona's family was reduced to two; the big black-and-grey dog pup and one black-and-tan bitch pup. The reduction was probably a beneficent one for Desdemona, for her flanks were very hollow now. Two puppies were quite enough for her to nourish, more especially since one of the two already demanded as much nourishment as any two ordinary youngsters of his age. The sunken hollows of the Lady Desdemona's sides gave extraordinary prominence to her low-hanging and not too well-filled dugs. Her shape and general appearance was strangely different from that of the sleek and shining young bitch whose beauty had aroused so much enthusiasm in the minds of all judges who had seen her at Shaws. An uninformed outsider would scarcely have recognized her as the satin-coated beauty whose supple grace had so impressed Finn a few months back, in the walled enclosure above the stables.

Yet in some ways the Lady Desdemona of the cave was a more admirable creature than the beautiful young hound who won so much admiration at Shaws. Desdemona had learned more during the past few weeks than in all the rest of her life. Sustained effort for others, and

consistent self-sacrifice, had set their distinctive seal upon a merely beautiful young animal; and now she had elements of grandeur and dignity, of fineness and nobility, such as no amount of human care and kindness can give, even to the handsomest of creatures. She had gone out into the open to meet life and deal with it in her own way; she had brought new life into the world, and nurtured it with loving devotion and self-forgetfulness; she had freely courted some of the severest of Nature's tests, and withstood them with credit to herself. So that whatever the show judges might have said or thought, she was a finer, better creature to-day than she had ever been at Shaws.

As the days slipped past in that early summer-time, the black-and-grey dog pup thrived wonderfully in Desdemona's cave. Having keen sight now in addition to the wonderful sense of smell which was his at birth, the black-and-grey had become a definite person already. Young though he was, he already knew the taste of rabbit's flesh, and would growl masterfully at his own mother if she claimed his attention—say, for a washing—when he had stolen one of her bones, and was busily engaged in gnawing and scraping it with his pin-point teeth. When Finn appeared, this masterful youngster would waddle purposefully forward, growling at times so forcibly as to upset his precarious equilibrium.

Twice he had adventured alone to the cave's mouth, and tumbled headlong down the steep slope outside, grunting and growling the while (instead of whimpering, as his sister would have done) and threatening the whole

South Downs with his displeasure. With never a hint of anything to fill the place of the much-discussed attribute we call filial instinct in the young of human kind, the black-and-grey pup conceived the greatest admiration for his father. But it was little he recked of fatherhood and he always vigorously challenged Finn's entry to the cave which he regarded as his property and his mother's. Her authority he was, of course, obliged to recognize, and, too, he liked her well. But though he recognized Desdemona's authority, he disputed it a dozen times a day, and made a brave show of resistance every time he was washed.

His little sister was his abject slave, and if in her slow peregrinations about the cave she should stumble upon a scrap of anything edible, he would promptly roll her over with one of his exaggeratedly podgy front paws and snatch the morsel from her without the slightest compunction. In the same way he would chase her from teat to teat when they both were nursing, and when full fed himself, would ruthlessly scratch and tug at his mother's aching flanks from sheer boisterous wantonness. At such times he would climb about her hollow sides, holding on by his sharp claws, and scratch and chew her huge pendulous ears, rarely meeting with any more serious check or rebuke than a low, rumbling hint of a maternal growl, which, as a matter of fact, alarmed his little sister more that it impressed him. In fact, Master Black-and-Grey was a healthily thriving and insolent young cub, who enjoyed every minute of his life and gave every promise of growing into a big hound—providing he should chance

to escape the thousand-and-one pitfalls that lay before him, regarding the whole of which his ignorance was, of course, complete.

The greatest adventure of his infancy came when he was just twenty-eight days old. The time was late afternoon on a warm day. Having thrust his sister out from the coolest innermost corner of the cave, the black-and-grey pup had curled himself up there, and was sleeping soundly, while his sister lay somewhat nearer the opening of the cave. Had the weather been less warm, the black-and-grey pup would have used his sister as a pillow, a blanket, or a mattress, and in that case the adventure might have ended differently. As it was his dream fancies were suddenly dispelled by the coming of a musky, acrid odour that swept across his small but sensitive nostrils with much the same effect that a sound box on the ear would have upon a sleeping child.

He awoke with a jerk, to see silhouetted against the irregular patch of sky that was framed by the cave's mouth, the figure of a full-grown mother fox. This vixen was closely related to the red fox to whom this cave had formerly belonged. She had long since learned of Reynard's end, of course, and, indeed, had seen his corpse within twenty-four hours of the execution. Though frequently moved by curiosity, she had never before ventured so near to the cave and would hardly have been there now but for the fact that she had seen Desdemona hunting a mile away and more. Now she peered in at the cave's mouth, informing herself, chiefly through her sharp nose, regarding its condition and inhabitants.

The black-and-grey pup snarled furiously, and the vixen leapt backward on the instant. Reflection made her scornfully ashamed of this movement, and she stepped delicately forward again. The smaller pup whimpered fearfully and that was the poor thing's death knell. The vixen promptly broke its neck with one snap of her powerful jaws and dragged the little creature out into the sunshine. All this time Master Black-and-Grey had been growling fiercely—his entire small body quivering under the strain of producing this martial sound. His fat back was pressed hard against the rear wall of the cave: partly, perhaps, to give him courage, and partly, no doubt, by way of getting a better purchase, so to say, for the task of growling, which really required all his small stock of strength.

Outside the cave, in the sunshine, the vixen was sniffing and nosing at the body of the puppy she had killed. She presented her flank to Black-and-Grey's view, and, for herself, could see nothing inside the cave now. Black-and-Grey had seen his sister slain. The blood of great aristocrats and heroes was in his veins. His wrath was tremendous; overwhelming, in fact; and, but for the support of the cave's wall, would certainly have been too much for his still uncertain sense of balance. Suddenly now his ancestry spoke in this undeveloped creature. Determination took and shook him, and spurred him forward. With a sort of miniature roar—the queerest little mixture of breathless growl, snarl and embryonic bark—he blundered forth from his dark corner, hurtling over the cave's floor at a gait partaking of roll, crawl and gal-

lop, and flung himself straight at the well-furred throat of the unsuspecting vixen.

Even as an accomplished swordsman may be wounded by the unexpectedness of the onslaught of some ignorant youngster who hardly knows a sword's pommel from its point, so this murderously inclined vixen was bowled over by the astounding attack of Master Black-and-Grey. The slope was very steep and the pup's spring a bolt from the blue. The vixen slipped, lost her footing, and went slithering down the dry grass from the ledge, snapping at the air as she slid, with bites, any one of which would easily have closed Black-and-Grey's career if they had reached him. But the puppy was quite powerless to put on the brake, so to say, and his progress down the slope was therefore far more rapid than that of the vixen. The breath was entirely knocked out of Black-and-Grey when he finally was brought up, all standing, by a sharp little rise of ground alongside the gap past which one saw across the Sussex weald from Desdemona's cave. Here it seemed he must pay the ultimate penalty of his unheard-of temerity, and be dispatched by the now thoroughly angered vixen at her leisure.

But in that same moment a number of other things happened. In the first place, having reached it from the far side of the ridge, Desdemona appeared beside the mouth of her cave, dangling a young rabbit from her jaws. In the second place, Finn appeared, climbing from the landward side, in the gap beside which the puppy came to the end of its long tumbling flight. Midway between the gap and the cave, the startled vixen crouched

on the slope, turning her head from the terrible vision of Finn, upward to the scarcely less alarming vision of Desdemona, now sniffing in the fact of her little daughter's murder.

The position was a parlous one for the vixen, and as she pulled herself together for flight along the side of the slope, she doubtless regretted bitterly the curiosity which had impelled her to visit the den of her departed relative.

The vixen leapt warily and doubled with real agility. But Finn was easily her master in the arts of the chase, and his strength was ten times greater than that of any fox in Sussex. The vixen was still well within sight from Desdemona's cave when her time came. She leapt and snapped, and faced overwhelming odds without wavering, but her race was run when the wolfhound's great weight bore her to the earth and his massive jaws closed about her ruff as a vice grips wood.

And in the moment of the vixen's death, just as Master Black-and-Grey so far recovered his breath and his senses as to sit up and take stock of himself, a pony's nose appeared in the gap alongside him and introduced another new experience into this adventurous puppy's life. The pony must have appeared to his gaze very much as an elephant would appear to a child upon first view. But Black-and-Grey growled threateningly, though he did take two or three backward steps. On the pony's back sat Betty Murdoch, who now slid to the ground and knelt down beside the pup.

Then Desdemona came shuffling down the slope with

reassuring little whines of response to her son's growling. And to these there came Finn, a trifle winded, and bearing traces of blood and fur about his bearded grey muzzle. So Master Black-and-Gray, whose knowledge of his fellow-inhabitants of the earth had hitherto been confined to Finn and Desdemona and his own brothers and sisters—now defunct—found himself at the close of this most adventurous afternoon, the centre of an admiring, wondering circle formed by his mother and her wolfhound mate, and the pony and Betty Murdoch.

Having regarded each one among his audience in turn, questioningly, he finally waddled out to his mother and thrust his somewhat bruised little nose greedily into her hanging dugs, so that Desdemona, forgetful for the moment of other matters, was impelled to lower herself to the turf and yield sustenance to her only surviving offspring.

CHAPTER XI

JAN GOES TO NUTHILL

"THE idea came to me quite suddenly when I saw Finn walk off with the best of his dinner bones to the Downs. I'd just come in from the village, and Punch was hitched to the gate-post, so I got into the saddle again, and set out on Master Finn's trail."

Thus Betty Murdoch, later on in the evening, explaining the position to the Master and to the Mistress of the Kennels.

"I felt sure he must be going to Desdemona," continued Betty. "And——"

"It really is a wonder we none of us thought of that before," said her aunt.

They were all assembled now in a roomy loose box in the Nuthill stables. Comfortably esconced in a bed of clean straw, Desdemona was nursing her puppy under the approving gaze of Finn, who sat on his haunches beside the Master, gravely reviewing his mate's changed situation.

"I think the cave must be quite four miles away; right out past Fritten Ring and the long barrow, you know, and I fancy poor Desdemona must have had quite a family, because, besides the one dead pup close to the cave,

I saw several little skeletons; quite a lot of animal remains scattered about—pieces of rabbit and the remains of another fox besides the one Finn killed. The extraordinary thing is that Jan, here, appeared to me to have been fighting the fox that killed his sister. He was growling away most ferociously when I found him."

"Yes, he's a real 'well plucked 'un,' is Jan, as you call him," said the Master. "Your pup, Betty. I'm sure the Colonel will say he must be yours, for you found him, and there's fully as much Finn as Desdemona about him. He will make a wonderful dog, that, unless I'm greatly mistaken. Well, now I must get over to Shaws and let them know about Desdemona. I dare say the Colonel will want to come back with me to see the bitch; so I'll ask him to have dinner with us."

As the event proved, the Nuthill family and Colonel Forde spent most of the evening in that loose box. Stools were brought in from the harness-room; and Betty Murdoch had to tell her story all over again, while the others made suggestions and filled in gaps with their surmises; and everybody's gaze centred upon Desdemona and her son, lying among the fresh straw. It is likely that Desdemona might have noticed the confinement of that loose box a good deal more than she did, but for the fact that she was thoroughly tired out. Her health was not good just then, and the events of the day seemed rather to have overcome her.

To the eyes of Colonel Forde and the Nuthill folk she appeared most cruelly emaciated. She certainly was thinner than hounds who live with men-folk grow; for she

had gone rather short of food while nursing her pups and had had to hunt for most of the food she did get. But in any case unless specially nourished for the task, and given the abundant rest of kennel or stable life, a bitch will always lose a lot of flesh over suckling her young. Desdemona was not really so emaciated as her friends thought her; but she was much thinner than she had ever been before; and above all, had not a trace left of that sleekness which sheltered life gives. The veterinary surgeon who came to see her next morning, by Colonel Forde's request, had never before seen a dog fresh from wild life; and he, too, thought Desdemona more dangerously emaciated than she was.

"We must get that pup away from her just as soon as ever we can," said the vet.

"But won't that make her fret?" asked the Mistress of the Kennels.

"Not very much if we let Finn be with her, I think," said the Master.

"And, in any case, she really isn't fit to go on feeding that great pup," repeated the vet. He even spoke of threatening trouble of the milk glands which might mean losing Desdemona altogether. Her complete loss of that smooth sleekness which life with humans gives deceived the vet. more than a little. And the upshot of it all was that Betty Murdoch took over the sole management of the black-and-grey pup—her pup, as Colonel Forde called him; and Desdemona and Finn were taken over to Shaws in a cart, Finn being kept with the bloodhound to prevent her from fretting for her puppy. At Shaws, Desde-

mona was established in a loose box under the vet.'s supervision, and Finn spent some days there with her.

Betty always said she had no earthly reason for christening her black-and-grey pup Jan; but that, somehow, the name occurred to her as fitting him from the moment at which she first saw him endeavouring to stand up and growl at her pony, Punch, at the vixen, and at the world generally on the Downs. From that same time, Jan seemed to every one else to fit his name; and it was clear he had taken a great fancy to Betty Murdoch, ever since she had wrapped him in her jacket and carried him home triumphantly on her saddle-bow, from the cave on the Downs.

If the season had been winter instead of midsummer, the orphaned Jan would doubtless have missed greatly the warmth of his mother's body. As it was, the harness-room stove was kept going at night to ensure warmth in the stable; and a large box; too deep for Jan to climb out from, and snugly lined with carefully dried hay, was provided for his use o' nights. Just at first, the deeply interested Betty tried feeding her new pet with warm milk food in a baby's bottle. But Jan soon showed her that though only a month old, he was much too far advanced for such childish things as this. He needed little teaching in the matter of lapping up milk food from a dish (especially as he was allowed to suck one of Betty's rosy finger-tips under the milk for a beginning); and as for gravy and meat and bones, it might be said that he tackled these things with the enthusiasm of a practised gourmet.

As a matter of fact, Desdemona did sorely miss Jan,

for a couple of days, despite the comforting society of her mate; but Jan did not miss her a scrap. At present there was not an ounce of sentiment in his composition. He was kept warm, he lay snugly soft, and his stomach was generally full. He had great gristly bones to gnaw and play with, and Betty Murdoch, with a little solid rubber ball, played with him also by the hour together. Beyond these things Jan had no thought or desire at present. He grew fast, and enjoyed every minute of the growing.

The Master's intimate knowledge of puppy needs caused certain mixtures to be introduced into Jan's food from time to time, which saved the youngster (without his knowing anything about it) from the worst of the minor ills to which puppy flesh is heir. The same carefully exercised knowledge, born of long practice, introduced other specially blended elements into the pup's food which made for rapid bone and muscle development. In a variety of ways the resources of man's civilization and skill were made to serve Jan's welfare; and it must be admitted that in most respects he gained considerably by losing his mother and the life of the cave.

With Desdemona matters were somewhat different. For a little while she was moodily conscious of the loss of her pups; and, too, she missed the wide open freedom of her cave life on the Downs. But, physically, she was in some disorder, and the treatment now meted out to her was very helpful and soothing in that direction. The fomenting of her sore and badly scratched dugs was most comforting. The cleansing, healing medicine given her was helpful. The gradually increased generosity of her

diet was gratifying; and at the end of a week her coat began to shine once more under the application of Bates's grooming gloves.

It is to be remembered that Desdemona, so far from being a creature of the wild, had centuries of high civilization behind her. Her little excursion into wild life was chiefly due to the inspiration of Finn's society; and Finn himself, despite occasional attacks of the nostalgia of the bush, was none the less a product of civilization; a deal more subtle and complex in many ways than the native folk of the wild.

So it was, no doubt, that Desdemona, for the present, gave very little thought to her cave life, and was soon reconciled to the smooth and easy routine of life at Shaws, and to the casual coming and going of Finn the wolfhound, as he might choose. The comradely affection existing between these two was a thing very real and good to see. It might be, then, than the Lady Desdemona had, as it were, sown her wild oats, and would have no inclination to depart again from the ordered smoothness of the customary walk of life for hounds of her high degree. Bates, the kennelman, earnestly hoped it might be so; for, with a view to future triumphs in the show ring, Bates still looked for the orthodox kind of union (as with Champion Windle Hercules) for Desdemona; to be followed by the careful rearing of classic youngsters whose fame should wipe out all memory of what must needs rank in Bates's mind, as the scandalous *mésalliance* of Desdemona's earlier days, of which black-and-grey Jan was the distinctly living and very substantial pledge.

CHAPTER XII

SOME FIRST STEPS

THE phase upon which little Jan now entered was as jolly and enjoyable as any form of sheltered dog life could well be. There were no kennels at Nuthill, and it must be admitted that kennel life is never the happiest sort of existence for a dog, though in some establishments it is so organized as to be a very healthy

Jan speedily became an object of affectionate interest for every member of the Nuthill household, and was, from the first, the special and well-loved protégé of Betty Murdoch, a privilege which, of itself, would have ensured his well-being. For Betty was an eminently sensible girl, besides being a kindly, merry lover of animals and outdoor life. And in her aunt and the Master she had perhaps the best sources of doggy information to be found in Sussex.

Thus Jan was never subjected to the cruel kind of ordeals from which so many petted dogs suffer. He was not treated as a delicate infant in arms for a day or so, and then ignored for a week. His internal economy was never poisoned or upset by means of absurd gifts of sweetmeats. His meals reached him with the unfailing

regularity of clockwork, and were so carefully designed that, whilst his growth never was retarded for lack of frequent nutriment, the finish of a meal always left him with some little appetite. And he never saw food save at his meal times.

But, be it said, Betty did not forget that in Jan's case weaning had been a very abrupt process. During his first few days at Nuthill he had as many as nine meals in the twenty-four hours, and for a week or more after that he had eight. Six daily meals was his allowance for several weeks, and in the later stage of four a day he was kept for months. After the first few days he never had two consecutive meals of the same composition. That fact affected his appetite, and, in consequence, his bodily development, very materially. In fact, when Jan had been only a few days at Nuthill, and but thirty-four days in the world, he turned the big kitchen scale at 13 lb. 7½ oz. In point of size and weight his thirty-fourth day found him pretty much on a level with a fully grown fox-terrier; though he was, of course, still quite unshapen, and somewhat insecure upon his thick, gristly legs.

"He's going to be a slashing big hound, Betty," said the Master, after weighing Jan. "And I think he's going to do you credit in every way. You stick religiously to the feeding chart and the phosphates, and we shall presently have Jan lording it over his own father—eh, Finn, boy!"

The wolfhound had been gravely watching the weighing operation, and now nuzzled the Master's hand, his

invariable method of answering unimportant inquiries of this sort. Then he walked forward and good-humouredly sniffed round the puppy's head; whereupon Jan impudently bit at his wolfhound father's grey beard, and had to be rolled over on his back under one of Finn's massive forefeet. There followed upon this a few minutes of romping that was most amusing to watch. Little Jan would rush forward at Finn, growling ferociously. Finn would spread out his forelegs widely, and lower his great frame till his muzzle almost reached the ground, while his tail waved high astern. Just as the bellicose pup reached his muzzle, Finn would spring forward or sideways, often clean over Jan, alighting at some little distance, and wheeling round upon the still growing pup with a grin that said plainly—

"Missed me again! You're not half quick enough, young man!"

And then, by way of encouraging the youngster, Finn would lower himself to the ground, head well out, and, covering his eyes and muzzle with his two forelegs, would allow Jan to plunge like a little battering-ram upon the top of his head, furiously digging into the wolfhound's wiry coat in futile pursuit of flesh-hold for his teeth, and still exhausting fifty per cent of his energies in maintaining a warlike growl.

Hardly a day passed now that did not bring the introduction of some new interest for the black-and-grey pup. Novel experiences crowded upon him at such a rate that he was always in some way absorbed. Meals were frequent, and, of course, a matter of unfailing interest.

Sleep also was frequent, as it is with all healthy young things. Given, as he was, plentiful liberty and abundance of fresh air and sunshine, Jan exhausted himself about once an hour, and took a nap, from which he would awake within five, ten, fifteen, or thirty minutes, as the case might be, once more charged to the throat with high spirits, energy, and puppyish abandon.

More by luck than good management, it happened in his seventh week that he killed a mouse in the stable. For some time he mounted guard over his kill, solemnly parading round and about it, emitting from time to time bloodcurdling growls and snarls, intended to warn the dead mouse of the frightful penalties it would incur as the result of any attempt to come to life again.

Then, the stable door having been left ajar, Jan valorously gripped the small corpse between his jaws and went swaggering off towards the house with it, questing kudos. In the garden he met Finn, who, with careless good humour, strolled towards him, offering a game. Jan tried his best to growl and to turn up his nose at the same time, indicating serious preoccupation with matters more weighty than play. But finding that his hold upon the mouse was gravely endangered by this process, he gave up the attempt, and swaggered on towards the front entrance, followed quizzingly by the wolfhound. Finding nobody in the porch, Jan fell over the step, dropped his mouse, growled fiercely, and then with a plunge regained his prize, and so past the place where the caps and coats hung, over the mats into the hall.

Here he found Betty and the Mistress, and at their

feet deposited his now rather badly mangled mouse; while Finn, like a big nurse taking pride in the escapades of her charge, stood at one side and smiled, with lolling tongue.

"Oh, what a fearsome beast it is!" laughed Betty, and ran to call the Master. Then Jan was patted and petted, and told what a fine fellow he was; and what a mighty hunter before the Lord; and Finn smiled more broadly than ever. This over, Jan was taken into the kitchen to be weighed (he being now seven weeks old), and was told in an impressive manner that he was within four ounces of twenty pounds.

"Pretty nearly half-a-pound a day increase. You'll have to take a cure soon, my friend, if this goes on," said the Master.

From this time onward many of Jan's games were sensibly affected by his slaughter of the mouse. He now treated the big shinbones that were provided for his delectation as live game of a peculiarly treacherous sort. He stalked, tracked, hunted and slew those bones with unerring skill and remarkable daring. Their tenacity of life was most striking. There were times when, having slain a bone after a long chase, poor Jan would give way to his natural exhaustion, and fall sound asleep with his head pillowed on one end of the apparently well killed and harmless bone. Yet as often as not, when he would wake, perhaps a quarter of an hour later, this same bone would once more betray its desperate and treacherous vitality by means of an attempt at escape. So that, even in the very moment of waking, the dauntless Jan would be

obliged to growl fiercely and plunge straightway into hard fighting again.

His first real bark was another dazzling experience. It came in his eleventh week, when he was as heavy as two terriers, though still somewhat shapeless, and gristly, rather than bony, as to his limbs. Colonel Forde walked into the garden one afternoon, followed very sedately by the Lady Desdemona, now sleek and shining, and more aristocratic-looking than ever. Jan was dozing in the front porch, and Finn away somewhere in the orchard. Jan sprang rashly to his feet, and, losing his balance, rolled over. Rising again, with more of caution and considerable anger, he took a good look at the visitors, and glared with special severity at Desdemona, who serenely ignored his existence.

Then, bracing himself firmly against the door-jamb, Jan opened his jaws and—barked. But the novelty of the performance, superimposed upon the concussion, and the exertion involved, was too much for his stability, and, with one prolonged but unsuccessful effort to hold on to his dignity, Jan rolled over on the side farthest from the door-jamb. It was not to be denied, however, that he had barked; and the strange sound—it was part bark, part growl, and in part a bloodhound's bay—brought Finn from the near-by orchard, and Betty Murdoch from the morning room, and the Master from his study, and the Persian cat from her perch on the hall mantel-shelf; so Master Black-and-grey had no lack of audience, and, indeed, received an almost embarrassing amount of congratulation, in the course of which he made shift to get

a good sniff at Desdemona's legs and satisfy himself that she was an inoffensive person.

That Desdemona was any relation of his own neither he nor she seemed for one moment to guess, though less than a couple of months had passed since he ceased to derive his sole nutriment and support in life from this same stately hound, at which golden-brown forelegs and low-hanging dewlap he now sniffed so curiously.

One result of her return to the sheltered life was that Desdemona looked almost twice as big and massive as she had looked in her nursing days. The pendulous dugs were no longer in evidence; but the rich, silky rolls about her neck lay fold in fold; the immensely long ears were veritable buttresses to her massy head. Her black nose gleamed like satin at the end of her long muzzle, above which lay an interminable array of deep wrinkles, radiating out and downward from her high-peaked crown. Just once the noble head was lowered—as that of an ancient Greek philosopher to an inquisitive child—and the crimson-hawed eyes directed downward as, in a calm, aloof spirit of investigation, the Lady Desdemona took note of the fussy movements of her own son.

"I don't think we have been introduced, have we?" she seemed to say. It was difficult to realize that, not many weeks before, hollow of flank, with the mother anxiety in her eyes, the same noble creature had battled and contrived to keep life in herself and in this same lusty pup out there on the open Down, four miles and more away, among the small wild creatures and the débris of her cave home.

Among the dog folk Nature has arranged matters in this way, wisely and kindly. Separated from her good master, Colonel Forde, for many months, or even years, Desdemona would have recognized him again without hesitation. But like every other canine mother, and like every creature of the wild, her own flesh and blood became utterly strange to her within a very few weeks, when separated from her during its first months of life. And from Nature's standpoint this is a highly necessary ordinance, since, after a few more months, Desdemona, mated elsewhere, might easily find herself called upon to rear an entirely new family in new surroundings. So it is that whilst among her kind, as among the creatures of the wild, there is nothing to prevent mother and son or daughter from becoming friends in the youngster's adult life; yet never, after the first separation, can they meet consciously as mother and son.

It was an interesting picture for the Nuthill folk and Colonel Forde to see Finn and Desdemona sedately strolling across the lawn together, tried friends and mates, divided sometimes by the impudent gambols, and even by the mock attacks and invitations to play of their own lusty son: the only whelp in existence, probably the only one who ever had lived, to carry in his veins in equal parts the blood of centuries of Irish wolfhound and bloodhound champions.

"Do keep them there!" cried pretty Betty Murdoch. "I simply must have that picture; I'll fetch my camera." And after some skilled manœuvring to obtain the sun's collaboration, the promised picture was secured.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME MORE FIRST STEPS; AND FEAR

FROM the end of his third month Jan began to follow the Master, the Mistress, and Betty Murdoch pretty closely and constantly in all their comings and goings within the boundaries of Nuthill and upon the near-by Downs. As yet he was never taken on the roads. From about this time on, too, his personality began to declare itself. He became especially Betty Murdoch's Jan, and showed clearly that for him she occupied a place by herself among Nuthill folk. They were all good friends of his, but Betty came before the others She, like one other person outside Nuthill, was more than a friend.

This other outside person, who played so notable a part in Jan's upbringing and development, was Dick Vaughan, the rather ne'er-do-well son of Dr. Richard Vaughan, F.R.S., etc., of Upcroft. If he lacked other serious occupation in life, it could not be denied that Dick Vaughan was a born master of the art of horse and dog breaking. He had never learned his craft in any formal way, but he could have trained a horse or a dog to conduct an orchestra if he had set his mind to it. And from motives best known to himself he did give a good

deal of his time to the schooling, in different ways, of Master Jan, generally in the company of Betty Murdoch. And as most dogs love a really competent teacher of their kind, Jan learned soon to love Dick Vaughan.

Also there was one person for whom Jan plainly had conceived a definite mistrust and dislike. This was Whittle, the under-gardener. Whittle was not, upon the whole, a bad fellow, but in his heart of hearts he feared all dogs; and especially he feared and disliked all big dogs. Also he regarded dogs in a garden as trespassers and enemies. Finn, who was, of course, perfectly conscious of Whittle's attitude toward his kind, always treated the under-gardener with a touch of disdain, generally ignoring his existence.

In the presence of the Master, Whittle had more than once made to stroke the wolfhound's head, and to speak ingratiatingly to him. At such times Finn would sniff and walk away, or draw backward a pace or two to escape contact with the man. If they met in the garden when no other member of the household was about, Whittle would half nervously curse at Finn: "Get out o' here, you thunderin' great brute!" and so forth. At such times Finn would gaze far into the landscape, pointedly and elaborately unconscious of Whittle's existence.

Jan, while yet small, was disliked rather than feared by Whittle; and for that reason was savagely prodded once with the point of a wooden dibber, when the under-gardener found him absently chewing the head of a carnation. Jan yelped at the thrust; and then, suddenly becoming conscious of Whittle's fear of dogs, allowed his

yelp to be converted into something very like a growl—a minatory, defiant note.

There was nothing out of the ordinary about Jan's recognition of Whittle's fear of dogs. All dogs are conscious, when they meet with it, of that particular weakness in a man or woman. As yet, Jan was too young to understand anything at all about it; but his senses made him, in his puppy fashion, aware of it, none the less; and thereby gave him an attitude regarding Whittle quite unlike his attitude toward any other member of the household.

It may be that fear takes shape as an emanation; has a colour of its own, belike, or a scent, or both, for canine eyes, noses, and intelligences. Certainly it is always recognized by dogs. In them, according to their age, character, and disposition, it inspires curiosity, contempt, dislike, and a sort of desire to tease. An ill-conditioned dog is sometimes moved thereby to vice and snappishness. All dogs are affected in some way by contact with it, and one has in a good many cases marked the same thing in horses, sometimes with results rather embarrassing for the human exhibiting fear. Some otherwise good dogs and horses have been spoiled and made untrustworthy as the result of frequent contact with people who showed fear of them. Such contact is apt to have a demoralizing effect upon young dogs, by undermining their respect for humans and their amenability to human control.

There is a well-known exhibitor of terriers who has never been able entirely to overcome his fear of dogs, and especially of big and strange dogs. But despite this

queer inherent weakness he is a man of parts and character, who is unwavering in disciplining himself. The consequence is that he is able to handle practically all dogs with apparently as much ease as though he were an ordinary and fearless dog lover.

This is a rather specially interesting feature of an altogether interesting question. The form in which human fear makes itself apparent to the consciousness of dogs is evidently modified in a marked way by the exercise of will-power and self-control on the part of the fearful human. Where there is little or no self-control, the fearful one had better keep away from animals. Where there is will-power, and it is consistently exercised, it would seem the emanation of fear becomes so slight or vague as to be scarcely discernible at all by the average dog; or, at all events, it is not such as to destroy the dog's respect for and responsiveness to the individual's control. But unless very sure of themselves and exceptionally well-disciplined, such people should, as far as may be, avoid physical contact; for once they lay hands upon a dog, it would seem the touch reveals to him even a measure of fearfulness too slight to be seen or smelt, as the more marked and uncontrolled kinds of fear seem to be seen and smelt.

Whittle, the under-gardener at Nuthill, was not a man gifted with much self-control, and his rather mean and spiteful fearfulness moved most dogs to mischievous curiosity and to contemptuous disrespect. They would sniff about his legs, as though trying to analyze his fear, showing far more curiosity than other folk inspired in them,

and a persistence that sometimes brought more moisture to poor Whittle's brow than his work ever produced there. Such tactics on Jan's part would often provoke a sly and more than half fearful kick from Whittle, which might have lost him his situation, had the Master seen it.

More often than not these kicks would miss their mark. But that would not prevent their eliciting an angry, threatening bark from young Jan, a thing bad for his character development and most distressing for Whittle, who always invited aggression by his shrinking, shuddering retreat from a barking dog. At such times insolent young Jan would follow up his bark by advancing threateningly upon his victim, swaggering over him as though he were a half-scotched mouse in the stable, and sometimes actually driving him out of the portion of the garden altogether.

"But you mustn't bark at Whittle, you know. Surely you know Whittle, Jan," said Betty one day, when she found her protégé standing in the porch and barking impudently at the under-gardener, as the man passed that way with a wheelbarrow. Jan barked again, with a little snort, turning his tail ostentatiously then upon the gardener, and trotting to his mistress, as who should say—

"Oh, that chap! Bless you, we don't count him as a real person, you know. Can't you see or smell the silly fear sticking out all over him?"

Whittle simpered readily as he passed—inwardly promising Jan a kick when next they should meet—and mumbled, for Betty's ear, some nonsense about: "Didn't reckernize me, did yer? Come on, Jan—good dog, then!"

—an invitation which, needless to say, met with no kind of response.

It was perhaps a pity that Jan ever met Whittle. His barking at the under-gardener was no more wholesome for Jan than "cheeking" an incompetent officer is good for a young private; or than going shod, and neglectful of salaams, into the room of a slack or inexperienced European employer is good for an Indian servant. One of the chief evils of indiscipline is that it begets indiscipline. It is highly infectious. A thing which ought always to be borne in mind by men and women, whether in dealing with their own or other kindreds, is that he who himself lacks discipline will never command, inspire, or enforce discipline. Observation of life in schools and kennels, ships and stables, camps and menageries, would soon make this abundantly clear to any one who was inclined to doubt it.

CHAPTER XIV

SAPLING DAYS

AT the age of six months, Jan, the son of Finn and Desdemona, weighed just 98½ pounds, and by reason of his well-furnished appearance might easily have been mistaken by many people for a grown hound. He was not really anything like fully grown and furnished, of course, nor would be until his second year was far advanced. But the free and healthy life he led, combined with a generous and correctly thought-out diet, had given him remarkably rapid development, and the strength to carry it without strain.

At this time Jan had, in outline, assumed his adult appearance. As time went on he would increase greatly in weight, and to some extent in height and length. His body would thicken, and his frame would harden and set; his coat would improve, and his muscles would develop to more than double their present growth. But in his seventh month one knew what Jan's appearance was to be; his type had declared itself, and so, to a considerable extent, had his personality.

There was not a brown hair in Jan's coat; not one hair of any other colour than black or iron-grey. His

saddle and haunches were jetty black, so was the crown of his head. But his muzzle was the right wolfhound steel-grey. So were his chest, belly, and legs, though the black hairs crept fairly low down on the outsides of his thighs and hocks, the inner sides being all hard grey. The grey of his chest extended, like a ruff, right round the upper part of his neck, forming a break of three or four inches between the silky blackness of his head and saddle. And all his coat was thicker, more dense, and longer in the hair than his sire's coat, which, again, was of course much longer than Desdemona's.

Thus, in colour and texture of coat Jan was neither all wolfhound nor all bloodhound. For the rest, his bodily appearance and build favoured his mother's race more than his father's. The depth and solidity of his head and muzzle, the length and shape of his ears, the rolling elasticity and plenitude of his skin, and the deep wrinkles it had already formed about his face, were all features true to bloodhound type, as were also the thickness and solidity of his frame, the downward poise of his head, and his deep-pouched crimson-hawed eyes.

But when one saw Jan extended at the gallop, or in the act of leaping a gate or other obstruction, one was apt to forget the bloodhound in him, and to remember only his kinship with Finn, the fleetest son of a fleet race of hunters. Jan had all the wonderfully springy elasticity of the wolfhound. Already he leaped and ran as a greyhound leaps and runs. Already, too, his accuracy of balance and his agility were remarkable. He could trot quickly across the long drawing-room at Nuthill

without sound, and without grazing anything. Occasional tables and the like were perfectly safe in his path. Despite his 98½ pounds of weight (still rapidly increasing), he could, on occasion, tread lightly as a cat.

But the bloodhound came out in Jan in other ways besides his appearance. He was for ever trailing, and used his dark hazel eyes far less than any wolfhound uses his. In questing about the place for Betty Murdoch, one noticed that Jan often did not raise his eyes or muzzle from the ground until he almost touched her skirt. Withal, his vision was keener than that of Desdemona's or any other typical bloodhound. His eyes served him well for scanning the Downs; and often he would see a rabbit in the far distance before picking up its trail. Still, once he did pick up a trail, he would follow it as no wolfhound could, with unfailing certitude, and without troubling to use his eyes.

The first notable demonstration of his trailing powers was his tracking down of a missing ewe, across several miles of open Down, to the edge of a remote, disused chalk-pit, into which the foolish creature had fallen and broken its neck.

The trifling episode which served to draw more general attention to Jan's all-round intelligence—which actually was considerably above the average level for a half-grown youngster—concerned Betty Murdoch in particular. It chanced that on a certain grey morning towards the close of the year Betty had a sudden curiosity to see again the hillside cave beside which she had found Desdemona and Jan, six months before. The grey weather,

so far from depressing Betty, often moved her to take long walks; and if no other companion happened to be available, she could always be sure of Jan's readiness to bear her company, as he did on this occasion.

The fact that Betty did not appear at luncheon-time roused little comment. She often was late for luncheon, and the only meal over which Nuthill folk made a special point of being punctual was dinner. Still, when three o'clock brought no sign of Betty, and the short day's decline was at hand, the Master and the Mistress did begin to wonder. Then Jan arrived, apparently rather in a hurry, and very talkative. His short barks and little whines left no doubt about his determination to attract attention; and the manner in which he bustled into the hall, hastily nuzzled the Master's hand or coat-sleeve, and bustled, whining, back to the porch, told those concerned, as plainly as words could, that he wanted them to accompany him.

"Why, what's this?" said the Master. "I wonder if Betty is in sight."

Out in the garden nothing could be seen of Betty; but having led his friends so far, Jan became more than ever insistent in demanding their attendance on the path leading to the little orchard gate that opened upon the Downs.

"H'm! Looks to me as though Betty were in a difficulty. I wish you'd send out word to the stable for Curtin to saddle Punch and ride on after me. Or, wait a moment. You stay here with Jan. I'll send the message, and get my brandy flask. One never knows. I'll be out again in a minute."

But this hardly met with Jan's views. He seemed determined that the Master should not go back. Whining and barking very urgently, he actually laid hold upon the Master's coat with his teeth, dragging with all his strength to prevent a return to the house.

"So, then. All right, good dog. I'll come, Jan."

And after all the Mistress had to go back for the flask, and to send word to the stable, while the Master walked out to the Downs. Jan was overjoyed by his victory; but within a few moments he was urging haste, and expressing obvious dissatisfaction with the Master's slow pace.

"Now you just simmer down, my son, simmer down," said the Master soothingly. "We haven't all got your turn of speed, so you might as well make up your mind to it. I'll have a horse here directly, and then you shall have your head, I promise you. Meantime, just keep your teeth out of this shooting-jacket. It may be old, but I won't have it tattered. So you simmer down, my son."

Jan did his best, but it clearly did seem to him that the Master's pace was maddeningly slow; and so, to make up for this, Jan tried the experiment of covering just six times as much ground himself, apparently with the idea that hurrying ought to be done, and that if he could not make the Master do it, the next best thing was to put in a double share himself. So Jan led the way downwards in loops. He would gallop on for fifty yards, turn sharply, and canter back to the Master, emitting little whining noises through his nose. Having described a circle about the Master, on he would dash again, with

more whines, only to repeat the process a few moments later.

Then Curtin, the groom, overtook them, riding Betty's cob, Punch, and carrying the flask which had been given him by the Mistress, who herself was following on foot. The Master slipped the flask into his coat pocket, and mounted Punch.

"Now then, Jan, my son," said he; "I'm with you. Off you go!"

They were soon out of Curtin's sight. Jan perfectly understood the position; and it seemed, too, that he communicated some idea of it to Punch, upon whose velvety nose he administered one hurried lick before starting. Then, with frequent backward glances over one shoulder Jan lay down to his task, and, followed by Punch and the Master, began to fly over the springy turf with occasional short bays, his powerful tail waving flagwise over his haunches.

Within eighteen or twenty minutes they were a good four miles from Nuthill, and nearing the gap in the high ridge, through which one looked out over the Sussex weald from Desdemona's cave. In another couple of minutes the Master was on the ground beside Betty, and Punch, with the nonchalance of his kind, was nosing the turf, as though to distract attention from his hard breathing. The gallop had been mostly uphill.

Betty was genuinely glad to welcome her visitors, for she had already spent several hours in the chalky hollow where she now sat; the evening air was cold, and Betty was in some pain. Clambering on the steep Downside

below Desdemona's cave, she had trodden on a loose piece of chalk, her ankle had twisted as the chalk rolled, and Betty had fallen, with a sharp cry of pain, quite unable to put her injured foot to the ground. For a long while neither she nor Jan had thought of any way of obtaining assistance.

"Then I thought of sending a message by Jan," said Betty, in explaining matters to the Master, after she had been given a sip from his flask, which brought some colour back to her pale lips. "I told him again and again to go home, waving my arm, and trying hard to drive him off on the way. But he would only go backward a few yards, and then return to me. I had almost given it up, when the thought came into my head that I ought to have had pencil and paper, and been able to tie a note to his collar. But I thought my handkerchief would do just as well, without any writing. I was on the point of calling Jan to me again, so that I could tie my handkerchief to his collar, when, quite suddenly, he also had a brilliant idea. You could see it plainly in his face. He had suddenly realized what I wanted. He gave one bark, blundered up against my shoulder, tore my hair-net by the hurried lick he gave me, and was off like the wind for Nuthill. It really was most odd, the way the inspiration came to him."

The Master nodded agreement. "It was extraordinarily intelligent for an untrained pup of six months. I doubt if either his father or his mother would have had wit enough for that at the same age. Very few dogs would."

After another little sip of brandy Betty was lifted care-

fully into the saddle, and Jan and the Master pacing beside him, Punch began the homeward journey. Jan was quite sedate again now, but he had fussed about a good deal, upon first arrival at the hollow, in his capacity as guide and messenger. An hour later, and Betty was comfortably settled on the big couch beside the hall fire at Nuthill, and very shortly after that Dr. Vaughan was in attendance, so that when tea came to be handed round everybody's mind was at ease again. The Doctor was for giving Jan a share of his plum cake as a reward for meritorius conduct. But Betty would have none of this.

"I'm surprised at you, Doctor," said Betty. "Bad habits and an impaired digestion as a reward for heroism! Never! Extra meat, and an extra choice bone at supper-time, if you like; but no plum cake for my Jan boy, if I know it."

But this sensible decision did not prevent Jan's being made much of by the whole household that evening; and partly by way of compliment, and in part because Betty could not go to the stable, he was promoted to grown-up privileges and allowed to take his supper in the porch that night beside his father. Upon showing a casual inclination to investigate his sire's supper-dish, he was firmly but good-humouredly put into his place by the wolfhound. Upon the whole, Jan bore his new honours well during this his first evening spent in a house. No doubt he received useful hints from Finn. In any case, it was decided next morning, by the Master's full consent, that from this time on, subject to his proper behaviour, Jan need not again be sent to his bench in the stable.

CHAPTER XV

WITH REFERENCE TO DICK VAUGHAN

ONE might search the English villages through without finding another such medical practitioner as Dr. Vaughan, the man who dressed Betty Murdoch's sprained ankle. For example, he was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and the records of his original research work won respectful attention in at least four languages. When he inherited Upcroft (the estate which flanks Nuthill to the eastward) and decided to establish himself there, it certainly was not with any idea of playing the general practitioner. But as the event proved, he was given small choice. For Sussex, this district is curiously remote. It contains a few scattered large houses, and outside these the population is made up of small farmers and shepherds, very good fellows, most of them, but not at all typical of home-county residents, and having more than a little in common with the dalesmen of the north country. Their nearest resident medical practitioner, before Dr. Vaughan came, was eight miles away, in Lewes.

Dr. Vaughan used to say that his only son, Dick, should relieve him by forming a practice in the district. But that was before Dick was sent down from Oxford

for ducking his tutor in the basin of a fountain, and then trying to revive that unfortunate gentleman by plastering his head and face in chocolate *meringues*. It was prior also to Dick's unfortunate expulsion from Guy's as the result of a stand-up fight with a house surgeon, and to his final withdrawal from the study of medicine as a profession he was adjudged unworthy to adorn. The judgment was emphatically endorsed by the young man himself, and so could not be called over-severe.

When it became apparent that Dick was never to be a G.P., Dr. Vaughan obtained the services of Edward Hatherley, a young doctor in search of a practice, and specially altered and enlarged for his occupancy one of the Upcroft cottages. This enabled Dr. Vaughan to decline the work of a general practitioner without hurt to his naturally sensitive conscience. But there still were people in the district whom he visited upon occasion as a doctor, and his friends at Nuthill were among the favoured few. Such visits, however, did not in any way affect his income, which, as the result of an unexpected legacy of some twelve or fourteen years before this time, was a substantial one, even apart from professional earnings or the rents of Upcroft.

Riding, shooting, fishing, coursing, breaking in young horses and dogs, and playing polo when opportunity offered—these, with occasional rather wild doings in London and Brighton, made up the sum of Dick Vaughan's contribution to the world's work so far, since the period of what he euphemistically called his retirement from the practice of pill-making. And it must be confessed that,

until some time after the establishment of the Nuthill household in that locality, Dick Vaughan had shown no symptom of dissatisfaction with his lot, or of desire to tackle any more serious sort of occupation.

What was generally regarded as Dick's idleness, and, by the more rigid moralists, as his worthlessness, was a source of some anxiety and much disappointment to that distinguished man, his father. From the doctor's standpoint a life given to sport meant a life wasted; and, gifted man of science that he was, it puzzled him completely that a son of his should have no ability as a student. Withal, he had never brought himself to show any harshness to Dick; for "wild" as the young man undoubtedly had been, he was a lovable fellow, and for the doctor his fair face was a reflection of the face of the woman Dick had never really known; of the mother he had lost while still a child: the wife whose loss had withdrawn Dr. Vaughan from the world of successful men and women, and prematurely whitened his hair and lined his lofty brow.

Yet in one respect the doctor had shown a certain sternness. He had told his son with some emphasis that, until he accomplished some creditable work in the world, he must never expect one penny more than his present allowance of £150 a year. There were good horses and dogs at Upcroft, however, and a very comfortable home. The farmers' sons of the district, like their social superiors, mostly liked Dick Vaughan well. He need never lack a companion in his sporting enterprises, and so far had never felt very urgently the need of money. Indeed,

the bulk of his allowance was wasted during the trips made to town after quarter days. Money was not very necessary to him at Upcroft, where most people were quite content to "put it down to the Doctor," and all were ready to oblige "young Mr. Vaughan."

And then had come Betty Murdoch, and a certain all-round modification of Dick Vaughan's outlook upon life.

It happened that one reason why Betty had no other companion than Jan on the day of her accident, was the fact that the Master had an appointment at Upcroft that morning with Dick. The Master was very good-natured in his talk with Dick, but he was also quite firm and straightforward. Dick rather shamefacedly pleaded guilty to having paid pointed attentions to Betty, and admitted that he was in love with her.

"Well, there's nothing to be ashamed of in that, old chap. I'm in love with her myself, if you come to that," said the Master, with a smile. "If you'd said you meant nothing, and were not in love with her, I—well, I should be taking rather a different tone, perhaps. But you are, and I knew it."

Dick's characteristic smile, the sunny, affectionate smile that won him friends wherever he went, and had given him a champion even in the tutor he ducked, broke momentarily through the rueful expression of his face, as he said: "Oh, there's no sort of doubt about that, sir."

"Exactly. Well, now, my friend what I have to point out to you is this: Betty is not only very dear to me; she is also my heir and my ward. I'm speaking to you about it earlier than some men might have spoken, be-

cause I don't want to cure heartaches—I want to prevent 'em. I'm pretty certain there's no harm done as yet."

The Master managed to keep a straight face when Dick absently intimated that he was afraid there was no harm done as yet.

"It would make Betty miserable to go against my wishes, I think," continued the Master, "and I don't want her to be made miserable. That's why I'm talking to you now. She could not possibly become engaged, except against my very strongest wishes, to a man who had never earned his own living, or done any work at all in the world. And that—well, that——"

"That's me, of course," said the rueful Dick, cutting at his gaiters with a crop.

"Well, so far, it does rather seem to fit, doesn't it?" continued the Master. "But, mind you, Dick, don't you run away with the idea that I have any down on you, or want to put any obstacles in your way. Not a bit of it. God knows I'm no Puritan, neither have I any quarrel with a man's love of sport and animals; not much. But there's got to be something else in a real man's life, you know, Dick. Beer and skittles are all very well—an excellent institution; especially combined with the sort of admirable knowledge of horses and dogs, and the sort of seat in the saddle that you have, my friend. But over and above all that, you know, I want something else from the man who is to marry our Betty. I don't ask you to become an F.R.S., but, begad, Dick, I do ask you to prove that you can play a man's part in the world, outside sport as well as in it; and that, if you're put to it, you can

earn your own living and enough to give a wife bread and butter. And if you'll just think of it for a minute, I believe you'll see that it's not too much to ask, either. It's what I'd ask of a man before I'd trust him to carry out a piece of business for me; and Betty—well, she's more than any other piece of business I can think of to me."

Dick Vaughan saw it all very clearly. He quite frankly admitted the justification for the Master's remarks.

"And so," he added, rather despondently, "so this is my notice to quit, eh?"

"If you took it as that, and acted on it permanently, I should think I had greatly overrated you, my friend," replied the Master with warmth. "No; but, as between men, it's my notice to you that I appeal to your sense of honour to say nothing to Betty, to go no farther in the matter until—until you've proved yourself as well in other ways as you've already proved yourself over the hurdles."

"Oh, that! But, of course, I love ridin', and—"

"You'll find you'll love some other things, too, once you've mastered them, as you have horses and dogs. I can tell you there's just as much fun in mastering men as there is in handling horses. I used to think the only thing I could do, besides breeding wolfhounds, was to write. And I suppose I didn't do the writing very well. Anyway, it didn't bring in money enough for the wolfhounds and —and some other matters. So I went out to Australia and did something else. Now I can do the writing when I like, and—well, old Finn there is in no danger of being sold to pay the butcher."

"Ah, yes, in Australia. I wanted the governor to let me go there when I left Rugby, boundary-ridin', and that. But of course he was dead set on the pill-making for me, then. And now——"

"Now there's been a rather empty interval of seven years. Yes, I know. Well, you think it over, old chap. I lay down no embargoes, not I. But I do trust to your honour in this matter—for Betty's sake—and I'm sure I'm safe. You think it over, and come and talk to me any time you feel like it. Be sure I'll be delighted to give any help I can. Look here! there's a friend of mine staying at the White Hart in Lewes: Captain Arnutt, of the Royal North-west Mounted Police. Go and look him up, and have a yarn with him about how he made his start. He nearly broke his heart trying to pass into Sandhurst without getting the necessary stuff into his hard head. But, begad, there isn't a finer man in the North-west to-day than Will Arnutt. I'll write him a letter if you'll go. Will you?"

Dick agreed readily, and, as a matter of fact, he lunched in Lewes with Captain Arnutt that very day, thereby missing all the excitement over Betty Murdoch's sprained ankle and Jan's clever rescue work, but gaining quite a good deal in other ways.

CHAPTER XVI

JAN'S FIRST FIGHT

DICK VAUGHAN was away from home a good deal during the next few weeks, and Jan and Finn often missed him, for his frequent visits to Nuthill had been full of interest for them. It may be, too, that Jan's mistress missed Dick Vaughan; but according to the Master, the young man was well employed and by no means wasting his time. And if Jan learned nothing further during this time from Dick Vaughan, he did have at least one useful lesson from another quarter, in the week following Betty's accident on the Downs; and it was a lesson which he never entirely forgot.

Up till now Jan's attitude toward his fellow-creatures had been very much that of a healthy, nice-minded English boy in a good preparatory school. With the single exception of Whittle, the under-gardener, nobody had ever shown him anything but kindliness. And with regard to Whittle, Jan had never experienced anything in the nature of fear. Indeed, Whittle was rather his butt. He regarded this man somewhat in the heartlessly contemptuous manner in which the normal human boy is apt to regard a half-witted or weak-minded person. When he approached the sullen but fearful Whittle in the garden, you could see in his wriggling shoulders the naughty

glee that possessed him. Almost he seemed to be saying—

"Hullo! here's old Whittle again. What a lark! See me make him squirm! Just to take a rise out of him I'll walk across this flower-bed. That'll make him sit up, I'll bet."

And for the rest, Jan took it for granted that all creatures wished him well and that most things certainly were for the best, in this best of all possible worlds. Then came his lesson.

Jan was busily doing nothing in particular—"mucking about" as the schoolboys elegantly put it—in the little lane which forms a right-of-way across the Downs, between the Nuthill orchard and the westernmost of the Upcroft fields. Betty Murdoch was still nursing her ankle; and, fast asleep in the hall beside her couch, Finn, the wolfhound, was dreaming of a great kangaroo hunt, in which he and the dingo bitch, Warrigal, were engaged in replenishing their Mount Desolation larder. Suddenly Jan looked up, sniffing, from his idle play and saw against the sky-line, where the narrow lane rises sharply toward the Downs, a grey-clad man in gaiters, with a long ash staff in his hand and a big sheep-dog of sorts, descending together from the heights.

The man was David Crumplin, the sheep-dealer, and the dog was Grip, whose reputation, all unknown though it was to Jan, reached from the Romney marshes to the Solent; even as his sire's had carried weight from York to the Border. Grip's dam, so the story went, had been a gipsy's lurcher with Airedale blood in her. If so, his size and weight were rather surprising; but his militant disposition may, to some extent, have been explained. At all

events, there was no sheep-dog of experience between Winchelsea and Lewes, who would have dreamed of treating Grip with anything save the most careful respect and deference; since, whilst hardly to be called either quarrelsome or aggressive, he was a noted killer, a most formidable fighter when roused. He was also a past master in the driving of sheep, his coat was of the density of several doormats, and he had china-blue eyes with plenty of fire in them but no tenderness.

These things would, of course, have been ample in the shape of credentials and introduction for any dog of ripe experience. For puppy Jan (despite his hundred pounds of weight) they all went for nothing at all. His salutation was a joyous, if slightly cracked, bark; a sort of—

"Hullo! a stranger; Come on! What larks!"

And he went prancing like a rocking-horse up the lane to meet Grip, prepared to make a new friend, to romp, or do any other kind of thing that was not serious. But, as it happened, the dour Grip was far more than usually serious that morning. By over severity in driving he had lost a lamb that day in rounding up a flock across the Downs. The little beast had slipped, under the pressure of the drive, and broken both fore-legs at the bottom of a deep pit. Grip had not made three such blunders in his life, and the lambasting he had received for this one had bruised every bone in his body. But for this, he might have shown a shade more tolerance toward Jan, since ninety-nine dogs in a hundred, even among the fighters, will show patience and good humour where puppies are concerned.

Jan's actual greeting of the sheep-dog was exceedingly clumsy and awkward.

"Hullo, old hayseed," he seemed to say, as he bumped awkwardly into Grip's right shoulder. "Come and have a game!"

That shoulder ought to have warned him. Its wiry mat of coat stood out like quills upon the fretful porcupine. But the rollicking, galumphing Jan was just then impervious to any such comparatively subtle indication as this.

Grip spake no single word; but his wall-eyes flashed white fire-light, and his long jaws snapped like a spring trap, as Jan rebounded from the bump against his buttress of a shoulder. When those same steel jaws parted again, as they did a moment later, an appreciable piece of Jan's left ear fell from them to the ground. Jan let out a cry, an exclamation of mingled anger, pain, bewilderment and wrath. He turned, leaning forward, as though to ask the meaning of this outrage. On the instant, and again without a sound, the white-toothed trap opened and closed once more; this time leaving a bloody groove all down the black-and-grey side of Jan's left shoulder.

At that point the sheep-dealer spoke, just a little too late.

"Get out o' that!" he said, with a thrust of his staff at Jan. And—" Come in here, Grip," he added to his own dog. But his orders came too late.

For his part, Jan had lost blood and realized that he was attacked in fierce earnest. As for Grip, he had tasted blood, and found it as balm to his aching ribs. This big

blundering black-and-grey thing was no sheep at all events. Then let it keep away from him, or take the consequences. Life was no game for Grip; but rather a serious routine of work, of fighting to kill, of getting food, of resting when he might, and of avoiding his master's ashen staff. Nothing could be more different from Jan's gaily irresponsible and joyously immature conception of life.

However, Jan was in earnest now; more so than he had ever been since, more than five months earlier, he had flung his gristly bulk upon the vixen fox who slew his sister in the cave. Some breath he wasted in a second cry—all challenge and fury, and no questioning wonder this time—and then, like a Clydesdale colt attacking a leopard, he flung himself upon the sheep-dog, roaring and grappling for a hold. It seemed that Grip was made of steel springs, india-rubber and coir. The shock of Jan's assault was doubtless something of a blow; for Jan weighed more than the sheep-dog; but he tossed it from him with a twist of his densely clad shoulders, and again as the youngster blundered past him he took toll (this time of the loose skin on the right side of the hound's neck) in his precisely worked jaws.

All unlearned though he was in these wolf-like (or any other) fighting tactics, Jan presented an imposing picture of rampant fury, as he wheeled again to face his calmly resourceful enemy. David Crumplin had now recognized the young hound as an animal of value and consequence in the world, and in all sincerity was doing his best to separate the pair. But the fight had gone too far now

for verbal remonstrances to have any effect, even with disciplined Grip; and as for Jan, he was merely unconscious, alike in the matter of David's adjurations and the thrusts and thwacks of his stave.

In the pages of a correctly conceived romance, one man (providing, of course, that he is a hero) is always able without much difficulty to separate two fighting dogs, even though he be innocent of doggy lore and attired blamelessly, as judged by the illustrator's standards for walking out with the heroine. But in real life the thing is somehow different. Not only are two pairs of strong hands needed, but it is necessary that the possessors of those hands should approach the fray from opposite sides, and be nimble and strong enough to get clear away, one from the other, when each pair has grabbed its dog. No single pair of hands can manage it in the case of big dogs, and a man's feet are not far enough removed from his hands to make them an adequate substitute for a second pair of hands.

David Crumplin, having speedily given up persuasion, yelled for help, and cursed and swore vehemently at the dogs, banging and thrusting at each in turn, without prejudice and without effect. Much they cared for his curses, or his ashen staff. Jan was bleeding now from half-a-dozen gaping wounds; and Grip, the famous killer, was in an icy fury of wrath, for the reason that this blundering young elephant of a puppy was actually pressing and hurting him—the best feared dog in that countryside. For, be it said, Jan learned with surprising quickness. He could not acquire in a minute or a month the sort of

fighting craft that made Grip terrible; but he did learn in one minute that he could not afford to repeat the blundering rushes which had lost him his first blood.

At first he strove hard to bowl the sheep-dog over by sheer weight and strength. Then he struggled bravely to get his teeth through Grip's coir mail at the neck. And if all the time he was getting punishment, he also was getting learning; as was proved by the fact that immediately after his own third wound he tore one of Grip's ears in sunder, and a minute later, got home on the sheep-dog's right fore-leg (where the coat of mail was thin) with a bite which would surely mean a week of limping for Grip. It was this last thrust that placed Grip definitely outside his master's reach, by fanning into white flame the smouldering fire of his nature. Indeed, for a minute or two, it even made the sheep-dog forgetful of his cunning, so angry was he; with the result that he lost a section from his sound ear and came near to being overturned by the impetuosity of Jan's onslaught.

And then suddenly the sheep-dog completely changed; as though by magic. His flame died down to still, white fire, his jaws ceased to clash; his ferocious snarl died away into deadly silence; he crouched like a lynx at bay. At that moment Jan's number was very nearly up; for Grip had coldly determined to kill. He had practically ceased fighting. He was merely sparring defensively now, with bloody murder in his blue eyes, watching grimly for his opening; the opening through which he was wont to end his serious fights; the opening which would yield him the death-hold.

Jan, who knew naught of death-holds, and was at this moment blind to every consideration in life save that of combat, would assuredly yield the fatal opening within a very few seconds; and that being so, it was a small matter to Grip that, in the meantime, the youngster should rob him of a little fur and blood and skin. No orders, no suasion could touch Grip now; neither could any form of attack move his anger. He was about to kill; and, for him, that fact filled the universe.

At last the moment arrived. When the breath was out of Jan's body after a missed rush, he stumbled badly in wheeling, and almost choked as the spume of blood and froth and fur flew from his aching jaws. At that psychological moment Grip, balanced to the perfection of a hair-spring, and calmly calculating, leapt upon him from the side, and brought the youngster's four feet into the air at one time. That was the opening, and, in the same second, Grip's jaws sprang apart to profit by it and enclose Jan's throat in a final and sufficing hold.

And then, as a mediæval observer might have said, the heavens opened and a whirling vision of grey-clad muscle and gleaming fangs descended from the high hedge-top, landing fairly and squarely athwart Grip's back. For a moment the sheep-dog sprawled, paralysed by this inexplicable event. In that moment his last chance was lost. The new arrival had whirled his huge body clear and gripped the sheep-dog's neck in jaws longer and more powerful than those of any other dog in Sussex. Grip weighed close upon ninety pounds; but he was shaken and battered now from side to side, very much as a rat

is shaken by a terrier. And, finally, with one tremendous lift of the greatest neck the hound world has known, Grip was flung clear to the far side of the lane, at the very feet of his master, who promptly grabbed him by the collar, and as though to complete Finn's prescription, hammered him repeatedly upon the nose with his clenched fist.

"I'l larn 'ee to answer me, by cripes I will!" quoth David.

By this time the sorely trounced Jan was on his feet, and Finn had begun to lick his son's streaming ears. From the inside of the high hedge came hurrying footsteps; and in another moment the Master appeared at the white gate, twenty paces lower down the lane. David Crumplin was offered the hospitality of the scullery for the examination of his dog, but preferred to get Grip away with him after an admission that—

"Your puppy there will do some killin' in his day, sir, if he lives to see it. But as for this other fellow—" pointing to Finn—"he could down any dog this side o' Gretna Green, an' you can say as I said so. I know most of 'em."

That was how Jan learned his first big lesson, and the good of it never left him, and often saved his life; just as surely as his father's great speed and strength saved it on this morning, in the very breathless nick of time when his throat had been bared to the knife that was between Grip's killing jaws.

In the beginning of Jan's first fight, Finn had been dreaming of a hunt in the Australian bush. Once or twice,

as David Crumplin cursed and ranted in the lane, Finn's dark ears had twitched as though in semi-consciousness of the trouble. Later, as Jan had snarlingly roared in his fourth or fifth attack, his sire's brown eyes had opened wide, and he had lain a moment with ears pricked and head well up, at Betty's feet. And then, with a long formidable growl, he had leaped for the porch. Half-a-dozen great bounds took him through the garden. A leap which hardly broke his stride carried him across the iron fence into the orchard, and a score of strides from there brought him to the hedge-side. The hedge was six feet high here. In the lane, which lay low, it was ten feet high. There was a gate twenty yards away. Finn scorned this and went soaring through the bramble-ends at the top of the hedge, and thence, a bolt of fire from the blue, to Grip's shoulders.

There was that in Finn's preliminary growl which told Betty serious things were toward. She dared not try to walk; but she shouted to the Master, and he very speedily was in the orchard upon Finn's trail.

A Fellow of the Royal Society, with a score of letters after his name and a reputation in two hemispheres, stitched the worst of Jan's wounds that morning, on the couch in the Master's study. Even Dr. Vaughan could not replace the missing section of Jan's right ear; but, short of that, he made a most masterly job of the repairs. And all the while, wise, grey old Finn sat erect on his haunches beside the writing-table, looking on approvingly and reflecting, no doubt, upon the prowess of the youngster who had caused all this pother.

CHAPTER XVII

GOOD-BYE TO DICK

ON a day in February, Dr. Vaughan and his son Dick ate their dinner at Nuthill, and spent most of the evening there, around the hall fire. On the flanks of the big recessed fire-place, one on either side, Finn and Jan lay stretched, dozing happily. Jan's wounds were long since healed now, and the rapid growth of his thick coat had already gone far toward hiding the scars, though it could not quite mask the fact that a piece of his right ear was missing. Jan was more than eight months old now, and scaled just over a hundred and twenty pounds.

Late in the evening, Dick Vaughan (who had honourably held to his pact with the Master where Betty Murdoch was concerned) had a little chat with Jan, whose ears he pulled affectionately, while the youngster sat with muzzle resting on Dick's knee.

"Don't much like saying good-bye to you, Jan, boy," said Dick Vaughan; "for, mind you, your education's nothing like completed yet, though you do think you know a good deal."

"Ah, well, there need not be any good-byes to-night,

Dick," said the Master. "We'll all be at the station in the morning, Finn and Jan as well."

"Ha! that's good of you," said Dick. "But you'll never let that youngster run five miles behind a carriage, will you? Isn't he too gristly in the legs yet, for the weight he carries?"

The Master smiled. "Trust me for that, Dick. I've reared too many big wolfhound pups to make that mistake. A few such road trips as that, and Master Jan would never again show a real gun-barrel fore-leg. Why, he weighs a hundred and twenty pounds. No; old Finn will lope alongside of us, but Master Jan can have a seat inside. I have seen some of the best and biggest hounds ever bred spoiled for life by being allowed to follow horses on the road in their first year. There was Donovan, by Champion Kerry, you know. He might have beaten Finn, I believe, if they hadn't ruined him in his sixth month, trying to harden his feet behind a dogcart on the great north road. The result was, when he was shown at the Palace in his eleventh month, his fore-legs had gone for ever—like a dachshund's."

"Ah! When I get back," said Dick musingly, "you'll be pretty nearly a two-year-old, Jan, boy."

"And if all goes well, he will be as strong a hound as any in England; won't he, Betty? You'll see to that."

"I will if you'll help to keep us going the right way," said Betty, smiling at the Master.

And so, directly after an early breakfast, the Nuthill party drove to the station, with Jan on the floor of the wagonette, and Finn pacing easily beside it. There was

quite an assembly on the platform of the little station to see "young Mr. Vaughan" off. For he was bound for Liverpool that day, where he was to meet Captain Will Arnutt, of the Royal North-west Mounted Police of Canada, with whom he was to embark for Halifax, *en route* for Regina, in Saskatchewan, the headquarters of the R.N.W.M.P., for which fine service Dick Vaughan had enlisted, after a stiff course of training under Captain Arnutt's personal supervision.

"Between ourselves," the Captain had told the Master, in Lewes, a week or two earlier, "neither I nor the Royal North-west have much to teach young Vaughan in the matter of horsemanship, and I look to see him make as fine a trooper as any we've got. But there's one thing we can give him, and that's discipline. We can teach him to face the devil himself at two o'clock in the morning without blinking—and I think he'll take it well. I don't mind a scrap about his having been a bit wild. He's got the right stuff in him; and, man, he's got as pretty a punch, with the gloves on, as ever I saw in my life. An archangel couldn't make better use of his left than young Vaughan."

This rather tickled the Master, who up till then had never considered archangelic possibilities in boxing.

"I was certain the boy was all right," he said.

There was a rousing cheer from the group on the platform as the up train moved off, with Dick Vaughan leaning far out from one of its windows.

"I'll be home in eighteen months to—to complete Jan's education," Dick had said when he bade Betty Murdoch

good-bye. And the Master, who was beside her, nodded his sympathy and approval.

"Trust me to watch over both of 'em, Dick," he said, in an undertone, and for the traveller's ear only. "You'll lose nothing by the five-thousand mile gap, old chap, and you'll gain a whole lot."

"You'll larn 'em about 'osses, Master Dick," shouted old Knight, the head groom to the M.F.H. And the farmer's sons roared lustily at that. Jan barked once as the train began to move, and the Master's hand fell sharply over Betty's upon his collar; for Jan, though not yet half so strong as his sire, was a deal harder to hold when anything excited him. Like his friend Dick Vaughan, he was of good stuff, but had not as yet learned much of discipline.

As the Nuthill party walked down the station approach to their wagonette, among quite a crowd of other people, Betty felt Jan's collar suddenly tighten—his height, even now, allowed her to hold the young hound's collar easily without using a lead, for he stood over thirty-one inches at the shoulder—and, glancing down, saw the hair all about his neck and shoulder bones rise, stiffly bristling. In the same moment came a low growl from Finn, who walked at large on the far side of Jan and a little behind the Master. There was no anger in this growl of Finn's; but it was eloquent of warning and magisterial in its hint of penalties to follow neglect of warning.

"Why, what's wrong now, old—— Ah! I see!" exclaimed the Master.

On the opposite side of the approach was David

Crumplin, walking towards the goods-shed of the little station, and followed closely by the redoubtable Grip. Grip's hackles were well up, too, for the three dogs had seen each other before their human friends had noticed anything out of the ordinary. But though Grip's bristles had risen just as stiffly as Jan's, and though the sensitive skin over his nostrils had wrinkled harshly, and his upper lip lifted slightly, the gaze of his wall eyes was fixed straight before him upon his master's gaiters. He saw Finn and Jan just as plainly as they saw him, but he never turned a hair's breadth in their direction, or betrayed his recognition by a single glance.

Grip was no swashbuckler, and he never played. Life, as he saw it, was too serious a business for that. But, and if fighting were toward, well, Grip was ready; not eager, but deadly ready, and nothing backward. Grip had his black cap either in place on his head, or very close at hand, all the time. It was doubtless with a sufficiently sardonic sneer that he presently saw Jan jump obediently into the wagonette. Grip had seen to the carting of thousands of lambs and sick ewes; but for himself to climb into a horse-drawn vehicle at the bidding of a lady! —one can imagine how scornfully Grip breathed through his nostrils as he saw Jan driven off, with Finn, as escort, trotting alongside.

He bore no particular malice against Jan, and in his hard old heart, probably thought rather well of the bellicose youngster. But given reasonable excuse for the fray, he had been blithe to tear out the same youngster's jugular; and, be the odds what they might, he would quite

cheerfully have stood up to mortal combat with Finn himself. But as things were, the first meeting of these three since the fight in the lane passed off quite peacefully.

All the same there was a ragged fringe to one of Grip's ears, and for weeks he had limped sorely on his near foreleg. It was written in his mind that Jan must pay, and pay dearly for those things, when a suitable occasion offered. He was no swashbuckler, and did not know what it meant to ruffle it among the peaceably inclined for the fun of the thing; but, or it may be because of that, Grip never forgot an injury, and if he had known what forgiveness meant, would have regarded it as an evidence of silly weakness unworthy any grown dog.

It is certain that Finn bore Grip no malice. That was not his way. Grip had offended by his ruthless onslaught upon a half-grown pup, and Finn had trounced him soundly for that. Now that they met, some months afterwards, Finn thought it wise to give warning, by way of showing that he, in his high place, was watchful. Hence his long low growl. In his adventurous life Finn had many times killed to eat, as he had frequently killed in fighting, and as an administrator of justice. But he never had borne malice and never would, for that would have been clean contrary to the instincts of his nature and breeding.

As for Jan, it would not be easy nor yet quite fair to analyse his feelings toward the wall-eyed sheep-dog. Jan's mind, like his big frame, was not yet half developed. It may be that he could never be quite so fine a gentleman as his sire; and in any case it were foolish to look for

old heads on puppy shoulders. He did not think at all when he saw Grip. But in that instant he tugged at his collar, without conscious volition, just as his hackles rose, just as sharp consciousness penetrated every part of him, of the wounds he had sustained under Grip's punishing jaws. It was not malice, but a sudden heady rush in his veins of the lust of combat, that kept his thick coat so erectly bristling, the soft skin about his nostrils wrinkling so actively, for several minutes after his recognition of the sheep-dog. Unlike Grip, it might be that Jan would, as he developed, learn easily to forgive; but it was already tolerably obvious that he was not of the stuff of which those dogs who forget are made.

"They don't forget the affair in the lane, either of them," said the Master, with a smile, after the wagonette had started. It may be Jan understood the words had reference to his first fight. In any case, he looked eagerly up into the Master's face, and from that to Betty's; and in that moment he was living over again through the strenuous rounds of his struggle with Grip.

"Silly old Jan," said Betty, as her hand smoothed his head affectionately.

"Truculent infant," laughed the Master. "Take note of the easy sedateness of your father in the road there." (The round trot of the Nuthill horses—and they frequently did the trip to the station in twenty-five minutes —was no more than a comfortable amble for Finn.)

"Jan," said Betty Murdoch to her favourite, as they walked together on the Downs some three or four hours later; "he's gone away to Sas-Sas-katchewan; and—he

never said a word, Jan! I wonder if he thought—what he thought."

If Jan had been human, he might so far have failed, as a companion, as to have reminded Betty that, in fact, Dick had said a good many words before starting for "Sas-Saskatchewan," including a significant sentence bearing upon his return next year to Sussex-by-the-Sea. Being only a dog, Jan failed not at all in the sympathy he exchanged for Betty's confidence. He just gently nuzzled her hand thrusting his nose well up to her coat-cuff, and showed her the loving devotion in his dark hazel eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

JAN BEFORE THE JUDGES

EIGHTEEN months went by before Dick Vaughan returned to England; and this period was one of happy and largely uneventful development for Jan, the son of Finn and Desdemona. (It brought high honours to the Lady Desdemona, by the way, both as a champion bloodhound, and as the dam of some fame-winning youngsters.) It brought no very marked signs of advancing age to Finn, for the life the wolfhound led, whilst admittedly devoid of any kind of hardship, was sufficiently active in a moderate way, and very healthy. Jan made no history during this time, beyond the smooth record of happy days and healthy growth.

"Just for the fun of the thing," he was entered in the "variety" class at the Brighton dog show, when twenty months old, and that was certainly a memorable experience for him. There were bloodhound-men at the show who vowed he would have won a card in their section; and there were wolfhound breeders who said the same thing of Jan with reference to their particular division. Be that as it may, Finn's son won general admiration when led out into the judging ring with the other entrants of the "variety" class.

The judge was a specially great authority on bulldogs and terriers; but it was admitted that there was no better or fairer all-round dog judge in the show, and his experience in the past at hound field trials and such like events proved him qualified to judge of such an animal as Jan. Still, his special association with bulldogs and terriers was regarded as something of a handicap by the exhibitors of other kinds of dogs in this class, which, as it happened, was an unusually full one.

As Jan had never before been shown and was quite unaccustomed to being at close quarters with numbers of strange dogs, Betty asked the Master to take him into the ring for her. (Jan weighed 148 lbs. now, and a pretty strong arm was required for his restraint among strangers, the more so as he was quite unaccustomed to being led.) So Betty and the Mistress secured stools for themselves outside the ring and the Master led in Jan to a place among no fewer than twenty-seven other competitors, ranging all the way from a queer little hairless terrier from Brazil, to a huge, badly cow-hocked animal, of perhaps two hundred pounds in weight, said to combine St. Bernard and mastiff blood in his veins.

There were also an Arab hunting dog, a slogi from Morocco, two boarhounds of sorts, some Polar dogs, several bulldogs and collies, and a considerable group of terrier varieties in one way or another exceptional. One of the bulldogs was a really magnificent creature of the famous Stone strain, whose only fault seemed to be a club foot. There was also a satanic-looking creature of enormous stature; a Great Dane, with very closely cropped

prick ears, and a tail no more than five inches long. This gentleman was further distinguished by wearing a muzzle, and by the fact that his leader carried a venomous-looking whip. The lady with the hairless terrier was particularly careful to avoid the proximity of this rather ill-conditioned brute, and of the weedy-looking little man in a frock-coat who led him.

In the course of ten or fifteen minutes, during which the ring was uncomfortably crowded, the judge managed to reduce his field of selection down to a group of six, which did not include the crop-eared Dane or exclude Jan.

"Well, come," said the Mistress to Betty, "this does not look like prejudice against the larger breeds: Jan, and two other big dogs, with one bulldog and two terriers." Betty only nodded. She was too much excited on Jan's behalf for conversation; and her bright eyes missed no single movement in the ring. It was all very well to say that Jan was only shown "for the fun of the thing," and because "a one day show is rather a joke, and not long enough to bore him." But from the moment her Jan had entered that ring with the Master, Betty knew that in all seriousness she badly wanted him to—well, if not to win outright, at all events to "get a card"; to come honourably through the ordeal.

The dogs now left in the ring were the Moorish hound —a creature full of feline grace and suppleness, with silky drop-over ears and a tufted tail—an exceptionally fine cross-bred collie, the Stone bulldog, a Dandie Dinmont and a Welsh terrier, the latter extraordinarily small,

bright, shapely and game. The slogi had apparently been most carefully trained for the ring. He entirely ignored the other dogs, stood erect on his hind feet at his master's word of command, jumped a chair with exquisite grace and agility, and in a variety of other ways exhibited both wonderful suppleness and remarkable docility. The collie was handsome, beautifully groomed, and rather snappish. The Stone bulldog made a picture of good-humoured British stolidity; and if his hindquarters had been equal to his superbly massive front and marvellously "smashed-up" face, he would have been tolerably sure of a win in any class. The Dandie Dinmont had the most delightful eyes imaginable, and was a good bodied dog, faulty only in tail and in a tendency to be leggy. The Welshman was a little miracle of Celtic grace; the very incarnation of doggy sharpness.

The only member of this select company whose presence was really distasteful to Jan was the collie. This lady's temper was clearly very uncertain; she had a cold blue eye, and in some way she reminded Jan strongly of Grip, a fact which served to lift his hackles markedly every time he passed the bitch. The Master quickly noticed this, and did his best to keep a good wide patch of ring between them.

The six were each favoured with a long and careful separate examination by the judge, upon a patch of floor space which, fortunately, was right opposite to Betty Murdoch's seat. Betty rustled her show catalogue to call Jan's attention when his turn came, and kept up direct telepathic communication with him during the whole op-

eration. This, combined with the Master's studious care in handling—a business of which he had had considerable experience—served to keep Jan keyed up to concert pitch while in the judge's hands.

When these individual examinations were ended, the collie and the Dandie were allowed to leave the ring. Their leaders creditably maintained the traditional air of being glad *that* was over, as they escorted their entries back to their respective benches; and then the judge settled down to further study of the bulldog, the Weshman, the Moor, and Jan.

Long time the judge pondered over the honest, beautifully ugly head of the bulldog, while that animal's leader did his well-meaning but quite futile best to distract attention from his charge's hind-quarters. He would jam the dog well between his own legs, and with a brisk lift under the chest, endeavour to widen the dog's already splendid frontage. But, gaze as he might into Bully's wrinkled mask, the judge never for an instant lost consciousness of the weak hindquarters, the sidelong drag of the club foot.

Very nippily, the clever little Welshman went through his nimble paces, dancing to the wave of his master's handkerchief on toes as springily supple as those of any ballerina. For the admiration of the judge and his attendants, the Moorish hound performed miracles of sinuous agility. With the size of a deerhound, the Moor combined the delicate graces of an Italian greyhound.

Jan offered no parlour tricks. Indeed, in these last minutes, his young limbs wearied somewhat—the morning

had been one of the most exceptional stress and excitement for him—and while the other three were being passed in a final review, Jan lay down at full length on his belly in the ring, his muzzle outstretch upon his paws, neck slightly arched, crown high and nose very low—a pose he inherited from his distinguished mother, and in part, it may be, from his paternal grand-dam, old Tara, who loved to lie that way. The position was so beautiful, so characteristic, and so full of breeding that, rather to Betty's consternation, the Master refrained from disturbing it, unorthodox though such behaviour might be in a judging ring. The Master nodded reassuringly to anxious Betty, and after all, he knew. Even when the judge paced slowly forward, pencil in mouth, Jan was not disturbed.

"I suppose he's hardly done furnishing yet?" asked the judge.

"No, he still has, perhaps, half a year for that; four months, anyhow," replied the Master. "He is only twenty months, and weighs just on a hundred and fifty pounds."

"Does he indeed? A hundred and fifty. Now, I put him down as twenty pounds less than that."

"A tribute to his symmetry, sir," said the Master, with a smile.

"Ye—es, to be sure. May I see him on the scale?"

So Jan was carefully weighed by the judge himself, and scaled 148½ lbs. And then he was carefully measured for height—at the shoulder-bone—and touched the standard at a fraction over 32½ inches.

"Re-markable," said the judge, "especially in the weight. He certainly is finely proportioned. Would you

mind just running him across the ring as quickly as you can?"

The owners of the other three dogs wore during this time an expression of inhuman selflessness, of superhumanly kind interest in Jan and his doings.

"It's a thousand pities he's so very coarse," murmured one disinterested admirer, the owner of the Welsh terrier. A moment later the Master had to hide a smile as he heard the owner of the bulldog whisper: "Nice beast. Pity he's so weedy. A little less on the fine side and one could back him as a winner."

To run well while on the lead is an accomplishment rare among large dogs, and one which demands careful training. So the Master took chances. He signalled Betty to call Jan to her, and then loosed Jan's lead. This was a signal of delight for Jan. He was tired of the judging now and thought this ended it. Not only did he canter very springily across the ring, but he cleared the four-foot barricade as though it had not been there and greeted Betty with effusion. A moment later, at her urgent behest, and in response to the Master's call, he returned as easily to the ring. Then the judge, thoughtfully tapping his note-book with his pencil, bowed to the exhibitors, and said—

"Thank you, gentlemen; I think that will do."

The order of the awards was—

No. 214	1
No. 23	2
No. 97	3
No. 116	H.C.

which meant that the Welshman was highly commended —and deserved it—the Moor took third prize, the bulldog second prize, and Jan, the son of Finn and Desdemona, first prize. And so, in the only show-ring test to which he had been submitted, Jan did every credit to both the noble strains represented in his ancestry. Finn was never beaten. The Lady Desdemona had never lowered her flag to any bloodhound. Jan had passed his first test at the head of the list, among twenty-seven competitors, and despite his judge's special predilection for terriers and bulldogs.

"Wouldn't Dick Vaughan have been proud of him?" said the Master. And when Betty nodded her excited assent, he added: "I'll tell you what, we'll send him a cable."

And so it was that a few hours later, a trooper in the Regina Barracks of the R.N.W.M. Police, five thousand miles away, read, with keen delight, this message—

"Greeting from Nuthill. Jan won first prize any variety class Brighton—credit your training."

CHAPTER XIX

FIT AS A TWO-YEAR-OLD

OUTSIDE the highly beneficial advantages of very healthy surroundings, and a generous, well-chosen dietary, Jan's development during all this time was largely influenced by two factors: the constant companionship of Finn, and the fact that all the human folk with whom he came in contact—barring the largely negligible Whittle—loved him.

His mistress, fortunately for Jan, was not alone a cheery, wise little woman, but also a confirmed lover of out-of-doors. But all the same, if it had not been for Finn's influence, Jan would probably have been somewhat lacking in hardihood, and too great a lover of comfort. The circumstances of his birth had all favoured the development of alert hardiness; but his translation to the well-ordered Nuthill home had come at a very early stage. The influence of Finn, with his mastery of hunting and knowledge of wild life, formed a constant and most wholesome tonic in Jan's upbringing; a splendid corrective to the smooth comforts of Nuthill life.

From his memorable struggle in the lane with Grip, Jan had learned much regarding general deportment towards other dogs. Under Finn's influence, and with the

help of Dick Vaughan's early training and his own inherited tracking powers, Jan became proficient as a hunter and confirmed as a sportsman. But experience had not yet brought him those lessons which had given Finn his prudent reserve, his carefully non-committal attitude where human strangers were concerned.

For example, supposing Finn and Jan to be lying somewhere in the neighbourhood of the porch at Nuthill when a strange man whom neither had ever seen before appeared in the garden, both dogs would immediately rise to their feet. Jan would probably give a jolly, welcoming sort of bark. Finn would make no sound. Jan would amble amiably forward, right up to the stranger's feet with head upheld for a caress. Finn would sooner die than do anything of the sort. He would keep his ground, motionless, showing neither friendliness nor hostility; nothing but grave unwinking watchfulness. If that stranger should pass the threshhold without knocking, and without invitation from any member of the household, Finn might safely be relied upon to bark, and to follow closely the man's every step. Jan would probably gambol about him with never a thought of suspicion.

If a tramp on the road carried a big stick, that fact would not deter Jan from trotting up to make the man's acquaintance, whereas Finn, without introduction, never went within reach of any stranger—with any amiable intent. Again, if any person at all, with the exception of Betty, the Master or the Mistress, approached Finn when he was in a recumbent position, he would invariably rise to his feet. Jan would loll at full length right across a

footpath when he felt like taking his ease, even to the point of allowing people to step across his body. On the strength of a ten minutes' acquaintance he would go to sleep with his head under your foot, if it chanced that he was sleepy at the time.

Yet, for all his trustfulness, Jan probably growled a score of times or more for every once that Finn growled, and no doubt barked more often in a day than Finn barked in a month. Jan hunted with joyous bays; Finn in perfect silence. Jan trusted everybody and observed folk—when they interested him and he felt like observing. Finn, without necessarily mistrusting anybody, observed everybody watchfully and trusted only his proven friends. Jan, in his eagerness for praise and commendation, sought these from any one. Finn would not seek praise even from the Master, and was gratified by it only when it came from a real friend.

By the same token Finn was far more sensitive to spoken words than Jan. It was not once in three months that the Master so much as raised or sharpened his voice in speaking to Finn. If Finn were verbally reproached by a member of the household, one saw his head droop and his eyes cloud. Jan would wag his tail while being scolded, even vehemently, and five minutes later would require a second call, and in a sharp tone, before turning aside from an interesting scent or a twig in the path.

Withal, Jan's faults, such as they were, were no more seriously objectionable than the faults of a well-bred, high-spirited, good-hearted English school-boy. Finn's disposition was knightly; but it was the disposition of a

tried and veteran knight and not of a dashing young gallant. Under his thick black and grey coat, Jan did carry a few marks, so shrewdly had Grip's fangs done their work; but life had hardly shaped him as yet; certainly he carried none of life's scars. Also, good and sound as his heart was, clean and straight though he was by nature, he never had that rare and delicate courtliness which so distinguished his sire among hounds. Even Desdemona, great lady that she undoubtedly was, had not the wolfhound's grave courtesy. Neither had Jan. He was more bluff. The bloodhound in him made him look solemn at times; but he was not naturally a grave person at all.

On the other hand Jan was no longer a puppy. The hardening and furnishing process would continue to improve his physique till after the end of his second year; but he had definitely laid aside puppyhood in his eighteenth month and had a truly commanding presence. He was three inches lower at the shoulder than his sire—the tallest hound in England—yet looked as big a dog because built on slightly heavier lines. He had the wolfhound's fleetness, but with it much of the massy solidity of the bloodhound. His chest was immensely deep, his fore-legs, haunches and thighs enormously powerful. And the wrinkled massiveness of his head, like the breadth of his black saddle, gave him the appearance of great size, strength and weight.

As a fact he scaled 164 lbs. on his second birthday, and that was eight pounds heavier than his sire; a notable thing in view of the fact that he was in no way gross and

carried no soft fat, thanks to the many miles of downland he covered every day of his life in hunting with Finn, and walking with Betty Murdoch.

Taking him for all in all, Jan was probably as finely conditioned and developed a hound as any in England when he reached his second birthday, and it is hardly likely that a stronger hound could have been found in all the world. It may be that for hardness and toughness and endurance, he might have found his master without much difficulty; for hardship begets hardihood, and Jan had known no hardship as yet. But at the end of his second year he was a very splendid specimen of complete canine development, and by reason of his breeding, easily to be distinguished from all other hounds.

And then, two months after that second birthday, Dick Vaughan came home on short furlough, a privilege which, as Captain Will Arnutt wrote to Dr. Vaughan, he had very thoroughly earned.

CHAPTER XX

DISCIPLINE

DICK VAUGHAN'S home-coming was something of an event for the district, as well as for Dr. Vaughan and the Upcroft household, and for Betty Murdoch and the Nuthill folk. He was a totally different person from the careless, casual, rather reckless Dick Vaughan who had left for Canada eighteen months before. Every one had liked the old Dick Vaughan who had disappeared; yet nobody now regretted the apparently final loss of him, and all were agreed in admiring the new Dick with more or less enthusiasm.

Already he had won promotion in the fine corps to which he belonged, and his scarlet uniform coat had a stripe on one sleeve. But this was a small matter—though Dr. Vaughan was prouder of it than of any of his own long list of learned degrees and other honours—by comparison with the other and unofficial promotion Dick had won in the scale of manhood. No uniform was needed to indicate this. One became aware of it the moment one set eyes upon him. It showed itself in the firm lines of his thin, tanned face, in the carriage of his shoulders, the swing of his walk, the direct, steady gaze of his eyes, and the firm, assured tone of his voice.

Always a sportsman and a good fellow, Dick Vaughan was now a full man, a man handled and made; a strong disciplined man, decently modest, but perfectly conscious of his strength, and easily able to control other men. This was what Canada and membership in the Royal North-West Mounted Police had done for Dick Vaughan in a short eighteen months.

For young and healthy men there is perhaps no other country which has more to give than Canada in the shape of discipline; of that kind of mental, moral, and physical tonic which makes for swift, sure character development, and the stiffening and bracing of the human fibres. In English life there was at that time a rather serious scarcity of this tonic influence. Canada is very rich in her supply of it; but the tonic is too potent for the use of weaklings.

Then, too, there were the R.N.W.M.P. influences, representing a concentrated distillation of the same tonic. The traditions of this fine force form a great power for the shaping and making of men. First, they have a strongly testing and selective influence. They winnow out the weeds among those who come under their influence with quite extraordinary celerity and thoroughness. Those who come through the selective process satisfactorily may be relied upon as surely as the grain buyer may rely on the grade of wheat which comes through its tests as "No. 1, Hard." The trooper who comes honourably out of his first year in the R.N.W.M.P. is quite certainly "No. 1, Hard," as much to be relied upon as any other single product of the prairies.

"It is not only that the man in any way weak is quite unable to stand the steady test of R.N.W.M.P. life. Apart from that, no blatherskite can endure it; no vain boaster, no aggressive bully, no slacker, and no humbug of any kind can possibly keep his end up in the force." So wrote a widely experienced and keen-witted "old-timer," in 1908, and he was perfectly right.

For example, the R.N.W.M.P. man who made an unnecessary use or display of weapons, by way of enforcing his authority, would be laughed and ridiculed out of the force. The thing has been done, and will be done again, if necessary. Aided only by the weight of the fine traditions belonging to his uniform, the R.N.W.M.P. man is expected to be capable, without any fuss at all, of arresting a couple of notorious toughs, and, with his naked hands, of taking them away with him from among the roughest sort of crowd of their associates.

And in the R.N.W.M.P., if a man does not show himself consistently capable of doing that which the traditions of the force say is to be expected of him, his place in the force will know him no more. There are no failures in the R.N.W.M.P.—they are not allowed. The force could not afford to allow them, because their existence—the existence of any of them—would weaken R.N.W.M.P. prestige; and that prestige is the armour without which the work of the force would be utterly impossible; not merely for the average trooper, but even for an individual possessed of the combined genius of a Napoleon, a Sherlock Holmes, and an Admirable Crichton.

As things stand, the maintenance of law and order in the western and north-western prairies, with their vast, trackless stretches of as yet almost uninhabited territory, is fully equal to the level attained in London or New York. The law is quite as much respected there; infractions of it are quite as surely punished; peace and security is to the full as well preserved. This truth is speedily understood, even by the least desirable brand of foreign immigrant. The fugitive from justice reckons his chances considerably better in any other place than the territory of the Riders of the Plains. And all this because of a handful of mounted men in red coats.

"The fact is," said a Minnesota farmer to the present writer, "it don't matter a cent what sort of a pull a man has, how many guns he carries, or how many dollars are behind him; if he breaks the law up there in the North-West, he knows he's just got to be jailed for it, sure as he's alive. It may take a day, or it may take a year. It may cost the authorities a dollar, or it may cost 'em a million, and a life or two thrown in. But that tough is just going to be jailed, and he durned well knows it. That's what the R.N.W.M.P. means to the North-West; and you take it from me, it's a pretty big thing to mean."

It is a big thing. And what makes it possible for that handful of redcoats is not money, or guns, or numbers, but a solid, four-square foundation of irreproachable prestige; an unspotted tradition of incorruptible honesty, tirelessness, braveness, fairness and real *decency*. This is the reason why no failures are allowed in the R.N.W.M.P.; this is the reason why eighteen months of

service in that corps, of a sort that earns promotion, means so much for the man who accomplishes it. It demands a great deal of him. It gives him an indisputable title to complete manhood.

Though the point was often discussed, it never was made quite clear who first suggested that Jan should accompany Dick Vaughan when, after three short weeks at home, he set out again for the West. The Master privately believed the first suggestion came from him. Dick was sure he had begun by begging for the privilege. Betty cherished the idea that her gift was unsought and quite spontaneous. At all events, once the thing was decided, nobody concerned doubted for a moment the fitness of it. Betty's own arrangements may have had something to do with it. For the Master and the Mistress had set their hearts upon Betty's having a season in London and a month or two on the Continent, in part with her Nuthill friends, and, for a portion of the time, with another relative. This made the prospect of parting for a time with Jan a good deal easier.

Then, again, Dick Vaughan had certainly "said a word" to Betty now. He had, indeed, said a good deal to her. And there was one little affirmative word she had given him, which he held more preciously significant than all the rest of the world's oratory put together. It was Dick Vaughan's own suggestion that he should serve a further probationary term. It was his own idea that he should earn the Master's blessing by winning sergeant's rank in the R.N.W.M.P.; and that not till then should

he allow his father to set him up in England. His decision in this delighted Dr. Vaughan, and confirmed the Master in his faith. It meant a further term of absence, but Betty Murdoch was sensible enough to be proud of the pride behind Dick's plan; and thus all were agreed.

Jan's opinion in the matter could hardly be ascertained; but no one who had ever seen Dick and Betty on the Downs with Jan and Finn, and noted the wonderful responsiveness of the young hound to Dick's control, would have entertained any doubt about this. Dick's mastery of animals had always been remarkable; his hold upon their affections had been one of the most striking characteristics of his life. And in this, as in other matters, his experiences in the West had taught him a good deal.

At home in Sussex, and even as a youngster, it had been recognized that Dick Vaughan could get rather more out of an average horse than any one else in the district. On the prairies he had so far developed this gift of his that his charger would lie down on the ground at a word from him, and remain lying, as though dead, without ever injuring or displacing his saddle, until given the word to rise; and this even though his neck were used as a gun-rest, and Dick's rifle fired from it.

Dick's horses in Canada—and he trained many—required no tethering. They would remain, all day if need be, upon the exact spot at which he bade them stand. They would push and nuzzle a man along a road, and never upset him. They would gallop, unridden, in any given direction, at the word of command, and halt as if shot at the sound of Dick's voice. He actually taught

a mare to leave her foal and come to him at the word of command. Not the wildest and most vicious of bronchos could resist him when he set his mind to their subjugation; yet he wore drilled sixpences in place of rowels in his spurs, and rarely carried a whip; though on certain occasions he might borrow one for a specific use.

During his walks on the Downs with Betty and the two hounds, he taught Jan to lie down, stand to attention, gallop in any direction, wheel and return without hesitation; and all this upon the instant of the word of command, or in obedience to a wave of the hand. He arranged for Betty to take Jan away with her for, say a quarter of a mile, and then, short of holding him, to ues every persuasion she could to keep him beside her. Then Dick would give a long call, and then another. It was almost uncanny to see, from the expression on his face, the struggle going on in Jan's mind. But the end was always the same. The second call took him away at the gallop, even from Betty. Then Jan was taught to remain on guard over any object, such as a stick, a glove, or a cap, while Dick and Betty, and Finn, too, went right away out of sight for, it might be, half-an-hour.

Jan learned these things readily, and with apparent ease. Yet his only rewards were an occasional caress and words of praise. And, apparently, there were no punishments in Dick's educational system. At least he never struck Jan. He really seemed so to influence the young hound that the withholding of praise became a sharp rebuke. Jan himself had no notion why he allowed Dick to

school him, or why he yielded this man a measure of obedience and instant devotion that he had given to no one else. The basis of Dick's power was the exceptional gift of magnetism he had: the special kind of magnetism which makes for the subjugation of other folks' wills and personalities, be they human or animal.

But, over and above this gift, Dick had faultless patience with animals. He never gave an order without making perfectly certain that it was understood. And he never betrayed the smallest hint of indecision or lack of assured confidence.

"Stay—right—there—Jan," he would say. "Guard—that." His voice was low, his speech slow, emphatic, distinct. It was a compelling form of speech, and yet, withal, hardly ever harsh, or even peremptory. And when, in the earlier stages, he had occasion to say: "No, no; that's no good. That won't do at all, Jan"; or: "You've got to do a heap better than that, Jan," the words or their tone seemed to cut the dog as it might have been with a whip-lash. You could see Jan flinch: not cowed or disheartened, as the dogs trained by public performers often are, but touched to the very quick of his pride, and hungrily eager to do better next time, and win the low-voiced: "Good dog! That's fine! Good dog, Jan," with, it may be, a caressing pat on the head, or a gentle rubbing of both ears.

Jan did not know why he learned, why he loved the lessons and the teacher, why he obeyed so swiftly, or why praise filled him to the throat with glad, swelling pride, while the withholding of it, or an expression of disap-

proval, sent his flag down between his hocks, and his spirits with it, to zero. Jan did not know, but he was merely exemplifying a law as old as the hills. The Israelites found out that righteousness was happiness, and that no joy existed outside of it. Righteousness—do ye right—is another word for discipline. The proudest and the happiest people in the world are the best disciplined people. Perfect discipline is righteousness for righteousness' sake. According to his lights, obedience to Dick was righteousness for Jan. Hence his joyous pride in the progress of his education. No form of self-indulgence could yield Jan (or any one else) a tithe of the satisfaction he derived from this subordination of himself.

His greatest trial, and, by that token, once he really understood it, his greatest source of pride, came in the severe lesson of being sent home in the early stages of a morning's walk. First it was from the garden gate; then from the orchard gate in the lane; and later from the open Down, perhaps a half a mile or more away. He would be gambolling to and fro with Finn, exulting in the joy of out-of-doors, and swift and unanswerable would come the order to return home and wait. Finn was to go on and enjoy the ramble. Jan, for no fault, was to go home alone to wait. And in the end he did it with no pause for protest or hesitation, and at length with no regret, all that being swallowed up by his immense pride in his own understanding and perfect subordination.

He might have to wait ten minutes or an hour, or more, on the doorstep at Nuthill; but it was notable that he never went unrewarded for this particular perform-

ance of duty. He was always specially commended and caressed for this; and he never altogether lost a ramble by it, for Dick would make a point of taking him out again, either at once or at some time during the same day. It was a stiff lesson to learn, this; and that was why, once learned, the practice of it was highly stimulating to Jan's self-respect and dignity of bearing.

Upon the whole, in the course of those three crowded weeks of holiday happiness and courting, Dick Vaughan managed to pass on to Jan a quite appreciable simulacrum of all the benefits which had made so markedly for his own development during the preceding eighteen months. And most notably was Jan developed in the process.

"We gave Jan a good physique, didn't we, Betty?" said the Master admiringly; "but in three weeks this wizard has made a North-West Mounted Policeman of him, absolutely fully equipped, bar speech and a uniform!"

"Oh, well," replied Dick, with a laugh, "we don't reckon to be very much as speakers out West, you know; and for uniform, Jan's black and iron-grey coat is good tough wear, and will outlast the best of tunics, and turn snow or hail or rain a deal better—won't it, Jan?"

CHAPTER XXI

SUSSEX TO SASKATCHEWAN

IN the absence of that three weeks' schooling, there is no doubt the journey to Regina would have been a pretty dismal business for Jan. It occupied close upon a fortnight, and there was very little liberty for Jan during that time.

Unlike his great sire, Jan had never been stolen, and had learned nothing of the dire possibilities connected with confinement behind iron bars. He tasted some tolerably close confinement during this journey; but he thought each day would bring an end to it; and, meantime, nobody ill-treated him, and, what was more to the point, he had some converse with Dick each day.

As the habit of his kind is, he had, of course, parted with Finn and the Nuthill folk without the slightest premonition regarding the duration of their separation. In the confinement of the cupboard beside the butcher's shop which he occupied while crossing the Atlantic, Jan thought a good deal of Finn, of Betty, and of Nuthill; yet not with melancholy. While at sea, he had several visits each day from Dick Vaughan, and during the preceding few weeks Dick had become very securely established as Jan's hero and sovereign lord.

Jan would never cease to love Betty Murdoch; but in the nature of things it was impossible for gentle, merry Betty to give this big hound quite all that masterful Dick Vaughan could give him. His heart had often swelled in answer to a caress from Betty; but his whole being thrilled again to the touch of Dick's strong hand, or to a word of command, or praise, or deprecation from him. Jan was a grown hound now, and newly initiated to the joys of disciplined service.

The train was worse, far worse, than the ship; but it came after the major part of a day at large with Dick in the picturesque streets of Quebec. And even on the train, with its demoniacal noises, and groaning, jarring, jolting lack of ease, each day brought its glimpses of Dick, and its blessed respites of ten minutes or so at a time on station platforms. Jan had travelled before in an English train; but that had been as a passenger, and with passengers, in an ordinary compartment. In the dark, cramped, and incredibly noisy hole of a dog-box on "No. 93" (as this particular west-bound train was called) Jan realized that railway travelling could be a very unpleasant business for a hound. A month earlier the experience would have exhausted him, because he would have frittered away his energies in futile fretting and fuming, and in equally futile efforts to force his way out through steel walls. Now his cramped quarters were made tolerable by the fact that quiet submission to them represented obedience to a personal order from his sovereign. What had otherwise been wretchedness and misery was now willingly accepted discipline, the earning of a sub-

stantial reward: his sovereign's approval and his own pride of subordination—a totally different matter from mere painful imprisonment.

Captain Will Arnutt had heard all about Jan by letter from Nuthill. One would not altogether say that so important a person as the Captain went to Regina station expressly to meet Dick and Jan; but it certainly did happen that he was admiring the flower-beds in the station's garden, when No. 93 hove in sight from the eastward; and being there, he decided to stroll on to the platform and watch the train's arrival, along with every one else who happened to be in sight at the time.

It might, perhaps, lead to awkward consequences if every non-commissioned man of the R.N.W.M.P. took to keeping animals in barracks. Both Dick and Captain Arnutt had thought of this, and accordingly Jan, the son of Finn and Desdemona, was welcomed upon his first appearance in the capital of Saskatchewan as Captain Arnutt's hound, brought from England by Dick Vaughan, and to be looked after for Captain Arnutt by the same man. Jan would have been tickled could he have perceived this harmless piece of human deception; but it was just as well he did not understand, since he would never have lent himself to it very convincingly.

By reason of his breeding Jan was, as a matter of fact, unique among hounds. Apart from this, no hound of his size or splendid development had ever before been seen upon the Regina station platform. The people of the West are a forthright, plain-spoken, and enterprising folk, and before he left the station, Captain Arnutt was offered

fifty dollars for Jan. Nothing damped by the Captain's smiling refusal to his offer, the sporting stranger said—

"Well, an' I don't blame ye, Colonel, neither. But, say, it's a pity to miss a good deal. I like the looks o' that dog, and"—drawing out a fat wallet from his hip pocket—"we'll make it a hundred dollars, an' the deal's done."

As Dick subsequently explained to Captain Arnutt, two thousand dollars had been offered, and refused, for Jan's mother. "And I'm dead sure twenty thousand wouldn't buy his sire."

But these figures were for private consumption, of course. Dick had no wish to invite the attention of the predatory; and, in any case, buyers and sellers of dogs do not talk in thousands of dollars on the prairie.

At the entrance to the R.N.W.M.P. barracks the unsuspecting Jan was violently attacked by a fox-terrier, the pet of one of the senior officers of the corps. This pugnacious little chap wasted no time over preliminaries, and apparently had no desire whatever to examine the new-comer. He just flew straight at Jan's throat, snarling furiously. Captain Arnutt was distressed, for he made sure the terrier would be killed, and that Jan would thereby make an enemy of one of the senior officers. But his fears were groundless, thanks to Jan's few weeks of discipline and training before leaving Nuthill.

"Come in here—in—here—Jan, boy. Don't touch him. Come—in—here!"

Jan stood for one moment, listening, his hackles

bristling resentment of the terrier's insolence. And then he walked obediently to Dick's side, the snarling, yapping terrier literally pendant from his neck.

"That was stupid of you, little chap," said Dick, when he had detached the terrier, and was holding him firmly in both his hands, still snarling angrily. "If you were mine, you'd probably get a hiding, my son. As it is, you'll stop that snarling. You—hear—me? Stop it!"

And reluctantly the terrier did cease his snarling. One could see the little beast slowly calming down in Dick's strong hands, like an excited patient under the spell of some mild anæsthetic. And then, having calmed him, Dick very carefully showed the terrier to Jan.

"Look at him, Jan boy. He's privileged—not to be hurt. Never touch him, lad. He belongs to us, you see. Never hurt him."

Then, rather ostentatiously stroking the terrier in full view of Jan, Dick put the little beast down, and bade it run away.

"No more snarling at Jan, mind. He belongs to us, you see."

And whether or not the terrier understood, he did, at all events, walk off towards the verandah of his master's quarters without further demonstrations of belligerency. Captain Arnutt joined enthusiastically with Dick in bestowing praises upon Jan for his forbearance and docility.

"I made sure the little fellow's number was up," said the Captain. "One good bite from this chap would have

about settled his business. And, mind you, he bit hard, too. There's blood on Jan's coat, look. A fine welcome we've given you, old chap."

Dick had noticed the fleck of blood on the grey of Jan's dewlap, which showed that the terrier had been very much in earnest. Jan's dense coat was thinner just there than in most spots; but even there a good deal of energy was required to yield flesh-hold to a terrier's jaws. But the wound was trifling, and Dick, knowing his hound, wasted no sentiment over a scratch of this sort.

"It's just as well, sir," said he to Captain Arnutt. "There are some pretty tough huskies hanging about our quarters, and this little start will warn Jan to keep a sharp look-out. He has to get used to more warlike conditions than he knew in Sussex, and the sooner he understands, the better for him—and for the others. I fancy he can take care of himself."

"He's certainly got the first essential—discipline. I never saw a more obedient dog."

Dick looked his pleasure at this, and ventured upon the hope that Captain Arnutt would pass on this testimonial among his brother officers; for well Dick knew the value to a dog like Jan of a good reputation, more particularly in so well ordered a little world as that of the R.N.W.M.P. barracks.

This opening incident ended, Dick was free to take Jan down to the stables and introduce him to his own horse and the other chargers in that division, as well as to their riders. Dick devoted considerable time and care to this introductory process, because he realized its importance.

He had obtained permission to quarter Jan with his horse; and an hour's work provided a rough bench for Jan at one end of Paddy's manger—Paddy being Dick's charger. Dick had another day and a half before having to report himself for duty, and had made up his mind so to instruct Jan during that period as to make it unnecessary that the hound should ever be called upon to suffer the indignity of being tethered, even during his, Dick's, absence.

The task proved an easy one, and Dick was given every kind of assistance by his comrades, most of whom were at once attracted by Jan, and inclined to regard him as an acquisition to be proud of. Before the day was out, Jan had successfully passed through a number of tolerably severe tests of trustworthiness, and Dick was satisfied that he might safely be spared the indignity of the chain.

For example, being left on his rough bench with an old dandy-brush to guard, Jan was approached in turn by half-a-dozen of Dick's comrades, who exhausted their ingenuity in trying to entice, frighten, or persuade him from his post. Jan eyed them all quite good-humouredly, wagging his tail in response to enticements, and growling a little, very quietly, when they tried harsher tactics, but remaining throughout immovably in charge of his post.

Then Dick went well out into the barrack-yard, and called quietly to Jan. Instantly the long, silky ears lifted. Snatching up his dandy-brush and gripping it firmly between his jaws, Jan rushed out in the yard, there to be rewarded with the assurance of Dick's affectionate ap-

proval, and the enthusiastic plaudits of the other troopers.

"You've put the Indian sign on him all right," said French, the Devonshire man. "It must have taken some doing to lick him into that shape."

"There's no Indian sign about it, old man," said Dick. "It isn't any lambasting Jan's afraid of. You watch his face now, when I lift this stick."

The men all watched, and noted that Jan did not move so much as an eyelid in response to the lifting of a stick.

"Well, that's queer," said old Cartier, the French Canadian dealer, who was visiting a friend in the barracks. "Don't seem as though that dog ever was licked."

"And so far as I know," said Dick, "he never has been. But, mind you, that's not to say he never will be. I'd never hesitate to thrash a dog if he deserved it, and thrash him good and hard, too. But so far Master Jan has never asked for lickings, have you, Jan? That's why he's not afraid of a stick; for I'd never hit a dog or a horse, unless really to punish him, so that he'd know it was a thrashing—not just a bid of bad luck for him, or temper in me."

"H'm! I believe you could get two hunderd an' feefty dollar for that dog, up north," said Cartier musingly; "maybe three hundred, if you broke him to harness."

Dick smiled quietly, and nodded.

"No, no," said O'Malley, the man of Cork; "he's going to stay right here an' be our mascot, aren't ye, Jan?" And Jan affably signified his agreement.

"That's all right," said French, knocking his pipe out

against the heel of his boot. "But what's going to happen to-morrow, when Sergeant Moore gets back with his Sourdough? You'll see some fun then, I fancy. Old Sourdough's been boss dog around here a goodish while now, you know. He won't stand for having this chap put his nose out of joint. And mind you, there's no dog in Regina can cock his tail at Sourdough. I saw him knock the stuffing out of the big sheep-dog of MacDougall's last year, and I tell you he'd have buried the sheep-dog before he left him, if Sergeant Moore hadn't managed to get a halter through his collar, and pretty near choked him. It was a close thing; an' they reckoned the sheep-dog had never met his master till then."

"Yep, that's a fact," said another man. "There'll be trouble with Sourdough, if you're not careful, Dick. He's a demon of a dog, an', by gee! he's sourer than his boss, an' that's saying something."

"Well, yes, I'd thought about Sourdough," said Dick; "and I'm glad his quarters are the other side of the yard."

"The other side!" said French. "Why, man, he owns the whole place. You see how the other dogs kow-tow to him. He's sour all right, and a fighter from way back; but the way he's built he somehow doesn't seem to make trouble with any dog that kow-tows to him. But God help the husky that don't kowtow. Sourdough will have his salute as boss, or he'll have blood. That's the sort of a duck Sourdough is."

"Ah! Well, he'll get civility from us, won't he, Jan? and if that's all he wants, there'll be no trouble. But I'll

tell you what, you fellows: if Jan's in the stable there with Paddy any time when I'm not about, don't you let Sourdough come into our quarters at all."

"It'd take a hefty chap to keep Sourdough out, if he meant coming in," said O'Malley. "But I guess we'll do our best, eh, boys? I reckon our Jan's a better mascot than the sergeant's tyke."

"But there mustn't be any fighting," added Dick; "and there won't be if we're careful; but there's nothing sour about Jan here, and you've seen he's obedient."

CHAPTER XXII

INTRODUCING "SOURDOUGH"

IN some respect Jan's life at the R.N.W.M.P. headquarters might have been simpler if he had been less lovable and less popular. As a matter of fact, whilst pretty nearly every one in the barracks took a fancy to the big hound and felt a certain pride in his unique appearance as a R.N.W.M.P. dog, the members of Dick's own division adored Jan to a man. His docility, his affectionate nature and his uniform courtesy, bound them to him, even apart from their pride in him and the influence of Dick Vaughan as champion heavy-weight boxer and crack horseman of the force.

There were eight or ten other dogs in the barracks, all of whom (including the bellicose fox-terrier who first welcomed Jan at the gates) took kindly to the big hound from Sussex as soon as they knew him and had tested his frank and kindly nature. They were none of them really big dogs, and that fact alone, apart from Dick's teaching, made Jan specially indulgent in his attitude towards them. After certain curt warnings, the two or three dogs among them whose natures inclined them to fighting, seemed to realize contentedly enough that Jan was somewhat outside their class, and in any case not a good person to quarrel with.

But there were two people who hated Jan from the moment they first set eyes upon his fine form, and these were Sergeant Moore and his dog Sourdough. The Sergeant and his dog had a good deal in common with each other and not very much in common with any one else. Sergeant Moore was one of the few really unpopular men in the force. But, if nobody in the district liked him, it is but fair to say that many feared him, and none could be found who spoke ill of him in the sense of calling his honesty or his competence into question.

The Sergeant was a terror to evil-doers, a hard man to cross, and too grim and sour to be any one's companion. But no man doubted his honesty, and those who had no call to fear him entertained a certain respect for him, even though they could not like the man. In addition to his grimness he had a stingingly bitter tongue. He was not a fluent speaker; but most of his words had an edge to them, and he dealt not at all in compliments, never going beyond a curt nod by way of response to another man's "Good-day!" When, with the punctiliousness of the perfectly disciplined man, he saluted an officer, there was that in his expression and in the almost fierce quality of his movement which made the salute something of a menace.

His forbidding disposition had probably stood between Sergeant Moore and further promotion. His contemporaries, the older men of the corps, knew he had once been married. His juniors had never seen the sergeant in converse with a woman. Withal, it was believed that Sergeant Moore had one weakness, one soft spot in his ar-

mour. It was said that when he believed himself to be quite alone with his dog Sourdough, he indulged himself in some of the tenderness of a widowed father who lavishes all his heart upon a single child.

There was little enough about Sourdough to remind one of a human child, lovable or otherwise. If the master was grim and forbidding in manner and appearance, the dog exhibited a broadly-magnified reflection of the same attributes. His colour was a sandy greyish-yellow without markings. His coat was coarse, rather ragged, and extraordinarily dense. His pricked ears were chipped and jagged from a hundred fights, and in a diagonal line across his muzzle was a broad white scar, gotten, men said, in combat with a timber wolf in the Athabasca country.

It was a part of Sourdough's pose or policy in life to profess short-sightedness. He would walk past a group of dogs as though unaware of their existence. Yet let one of those dogs but cock an eye of impudence in his direction, or glance with lifting eyebrow at one of his fellows, with a sneer or jeer in his heart for Sourdough, and in that instant Sourdough would be upon him like an angry lynx, with a bitter snarl, and a snap that was pretty certain to leave its scar. This done, Sourdough would pass on, with hackles erect and a hunch of his shoulders which seemed to say—

"When next you are inclined to rudeness, remember that Sourdough knows all things, forgets nothing, and bites deep."

The story went that in his youth Sourdough had led

a team of sled-dogs, and that he had saved Moore's life on one occasion when every one of his team-mates had either died or deserted his post. He was of the mixed northern breed whose members are called huskies, but he was bigger and heavier than most huskies and weighed just upon a hundred pounds. A wagon wheel had once gone over his tail (when nine dogs out of ten would have lost their lives by receiving the wheel on their hind-quarters), and this appendage now had a curious bend in the middle of it, making it rather like a bulldog's "crank" tail, but long and bushy. He was far from being a handsome dog; but he looked every inch a fighter, and there was a certain invincibility about his appearance which, combined with his swiftness in action and the devastating severity of all his attacks, served to win for him the submissive respect of almost every dog he met. Occasionally, and upon a first meeting, some careless, undiscerning dog would overlook these qualities. The same dog never made the same mistake a second time.

Dick Vaughan made it his business to be on hand when Sourdough first met Jan. When ordered to do so, Jan had learned to keep his muzzle within a yard of Dick's heels, and that was his position when Sergeant Moore came striding across the yard with Sourdough. Jan's hackles rose the moment he set eyes on the big husky. Sourdough, as his way was, glared in another direction. But his hackles rose also, and his upper lip lifted slightly as the skin of his nose wrinkled. Clearly there was to be no sympathy between these two.

Suddenly, and without apparently having looked in

Jan's direction, Sourdough leapt sideways at him with an angry snarl.

"Keep in—Jan; keep in—boy," said Dick firmly, as he jumped between the two dogs.

"Who gave you permission to bring that dog here?" snapped the sergeant at Dick.

"Taking care of him for Captain Arnutt, sir," was the reply.

"H'm! Well, see you take care of him then, and keep him out of the way. Sourdough's boss here, and if this one is to stay around, the sooner he learns it the better."

"Yes, sir. He's thoroughly good-tempered and obedient though he is such a big fellow," said Dick, still manœuvring his legs as a barrier betwixt the two dogs.

"It's little odds how big he is," growled the sergeant. "He'll have to learn his lesson, an' I guess Sourdough will teach him."

Just then Sourdough succeeded in evading Dick, and got well home on Jan's right shoulder with a punishing slash of his razor fangs. Jan gave a snarl that was half a roar. His antipathy had been aroused at the outset. Now his blood was drawn. He had been ordered to keep to heel, but——

"Keep in, there—Jan; keep in—in!"

The warning came not a second too soon. Almost the hound had sprung.

"Would you call your dog off, sir?" said Dick.

"I guess Sourdough 'll call himself off when he's good an' ready," replied the sergeant; and himself strode on across the yard.

Once more Jan had to submit to the bitter ordeal of being slashed at by Sourdough's teeth, as the big husky snarlingly passed him in the sergeant's wake. It was little Jan cared for the bite shrewd as that was. His coat was dense. But again, and with a visible gulp of pain, he was compelled to swallow the humiliation of lowering his muzzle in answer to his lord's

"Keep in, there! Steady! Keep in, Jan!"

It was a tough morsel to swallow. But the disciplined Jan swallowed it, in full view of several lesser dogs, and of half-a-dozen of Dick's comrades. With it, however, came a natural swelling of the antipathy which his first glimpse of Sourdough had implanted in the big hound, and it may be, all things considered, that it would have been better for both of them if Dick Vaughan had allowed the dogs to settle matters in their own fashion. But he had Jan's future position in the barracks to think of, and wished to consult Captain Arnutt before permitting any open breach of the peace. Meantime, Jan's prestige had been lowered in the eyes of half-a-dozen other dogs, each one of whom would certainly presume upon the unresented affront they had seen put upon him by their common enemy.

Captain Arnutt's advice was to let the dogs take their chances.

"Every one knows Sourdough is a morose old devil," he said, "and every one has seen now that Jan is not a quarrelsome dog. If there's trouble, they won't blame Jan, and Master Sourdough will have to take his gruel. You don't think he'd seriously damage Jan, do you?"

"Well, he's got a deal more of ring-craft, sir, of course," said Dick, with a smile. "Jan has had very little fighting experience, but he's immensely strong and fit, and—no, I don't much think Sourdough could do him any permanent harm; but one can't be certain. Sourdough is practically a wolf, so far as fighting goes. He and his forebears have fought ever since their eyes were opened. Whereas, I suppose there's hardly been a fighter in a hundred generations of Jan's ancestors."

Dick Vaughan was probably thinking of the Lady Desdemona when he said this. And, of course, it was true that, even on Finn's side, Jan had had no fighting ancestors for very many generations. But Finn had been a mighty fighter, and in the wild at that. And Jan had been born in a cave, and in his first weeks had tasted the wild life. Also he had fought Grip, who fought like a wolf. Also he had learned many things from Finn on the Sussex Downs; he did not know the meaning of fear, and his hundred and fifty pounds of perfect development consisted almost entirely of fighting material. There was no waste matter in Jan. Still, Sourdough was a veritable wolf in combat, and for so long as he could prevent a breach of the peace, Dick decided he would do so. Accordingly, while in barracks, Jan was kept pretty closely to sentinel duty in Paddy's stall.

CHAPTER XXIII

MURDER!

A DAY or so after Jan's first meeting with Sourdough, a thing occurred in Regina which, for a little while, occupied the minds of most people, to the exclusion of such matter as the relations between any two dogs.

A woman and her husband were found murdered in a little fruiterer's and greengrocer's shop. Evidence showed that the murder must have occurred late at night. It was discovered quite early in the morning, and before the first passenger trains of the day stopped at Regina the line was closely watched for a good many miles. It was believed that the murderer could not be very far away. Suspicion attached to a compatriot of the murdered pair, a Greek, who was found missing from his lodging. Within three hours Sergeant Moore had rounded this man up a few miles from the city, and placed him under arrest. But the man had been found in the act of fishing, and there was not a tittle of evidence of any kind against him.

Then a neighbour called at the R.N.W.M.P. barracks with word of an Italian now nowhere to be found, who had done some casual work for the murdered couple, and had more than once been seen talking with the

woman in the little yard behind their shop. As it happened, the bearer of this information imparted it to Dick Vaughan, who promptly went with it to Captain Arnutt.

"Look here, sir," said Dick, with suppressed excitement, "my Jan is half a bloodhound, and a splendid tracker. Will you let me take him down to the shop and——"

"Why the deuce didn't you think of that earlier, before all the world and his wife began investigating the place? Come on! Bring my horse and your own."

Within half-an-hour, Captain Arnutt, Dick Vaughan, Jan, and one town constable were alone in the little, littered room of the tragedy; where the dead lay practically as they had been discovered. Two incriminating articles only had been found: a sheath-knife with a carved haft, and a black soft felt hat. There were no name or initials on either, and both might conceivably have belonged to the murdered man. As yet no one had identified either article with any owner. The hat had been trodden down by a boot-heel in a slither of blood on the floorcloth of the squalid little room.

Some chances had to be taken. Dick believed the hat and knife belonged to the murderer, who had apparently ransacked the till of the little shop, and broken open a small carved and painted box which may have contained money. It was perhaps impossible that Jan could understand that murder had been done. But there was no shadow of doubt he knew grave matters were toward. The concentrated earnestness of Dick Vaughan had somehow communicated itself to the hound's mind. It was the

hat and not the knife to which Dick pinned his faith; the cheap, soiled, crimson-lined felt hat, with its horrid stains and its imprint of a boot-heel.

"It may have belonged to this poor chap," said Captain Arnutt, pointing to the body of the shop-keeper. "It's just the kind nine Dagoes out of ten do wear."

"That's true, sir, but the missing man's a Dago, too, you know; an Italian. Italians are fond of knives like this and hats like that. Let's try it, sir. Jan knows. Look at him."

Jan had sniffed long and meaning at the bedraggled hat, and now was unmistakably following a trail to the closed back door. The trouble was that many feet had trodden that floor during the past few hours. Still there was a chance. Dick carefully wrapped the hat in paper, for safe-keeping in his saddle-bag. Then the door was opened, and with eager care, the two men followed Jan out into the yard. Here it was obvious that the confusion of fresh trails puzzled Jan for some minutes. Again Dick showed him the hat, and again Jan sniffed. Then back to earth went his muzzle, and all unseeing he brought up against the yard gate with a sudden deep bay.

"That's the tracking note," said Dick, with suppressed eagerness. "We'd better get our horses, sir."

Through the town streets Jan faltered only twice or thrice and then not for long. Within ten minutes he was on the open prairie, heading north-westward, as for Long Lake, his pace steady and increasing now, his deep-flewed muzzle low to the ground.

For more than two-and-twenty miles Jan loped along over the cocoa-like dust of the trail, and never faltered

once save at the side of a little slough, where the two horsemen in his rear spent a few anxious minutes while Jan paced this way and that, with indecision showing in each movement of his massive head. And then, again with a rich deep bay—a note of reassurance for the horseman, and of doom for a fugitive, if such an one could have heard it—Jan was off again on the trail, closely, but by no means hurryingly, followed by the Captain and Dick.

In the twenty-second mile, Jan brought his followers to the door of a settler's little two-roomed shack, and then, within the minute was off again along the side of a half-mile stretch of wheat. Captain Arnutt dismounted for a moment to speak to a woman who came to the door. Not half-an-hour earlier she said, she had given a drink of tea and some bread and meat to a dark, thin man, with a red handkerchief tied over his head: "A Dago, he was," she said. And Captain Arnutt bit hard on one end of his moustache as he thanked the woman, mounted again, and galloped off after Dick and Jan.

As he rode, the Captain turned back the flap of his magazine pistol-holster; but the precaution was not needed. Jan was travelling at the gallop now, and the height of his muzzle from the ground showed clearly that he was on a warm trail, which, for such nostrils as his, required no holding at all.

It was under the lee of a heap of last year's wheat-straw that Jan came to the end of his trail; his fore-feet planted hard in the dust before him, his head well lifted, his jaws parted to give free passage to the deep, bell-like call of his baying. The man with the red kerchief tied over his head was evidently roused from sleep by Jan,

and though the hound showed no sign of molesting him, yet must he have formed a terrifying picture for the new-opened eyes of the Italian. Almost before the man had raised himself into a sitting posture, Dick Vaughan had jumped from the saddle and was beside him.

"Don't move," said Dick, "and the dog won't hurt you. If you move your hands, he'll be at your throat. See! Better let me slip these on—so! All right, Jan, boy. Stay there."

When Captain Arnutt dismounted, he found his subordinate standing beside a handcuffed man, who sat on the ground, glaring hopelessly at the hound responsible for his capture. Jan's tongue hung out from one side of his parted jaws, and his face expressed satisfaction and good humour. He had done his job and done it well. The thought of injuring his quarry had never occurred to him, as Dick Vaughan very well knew, despite his warning remark to the Italian. But although Jan had had no thought of attacking the recumbent man he had trailed, he was very fully conscious that this man was his quarry. The handcuffing episode had not been lost upon him.

From the outset he had known that he and Dick were hunting that day. Why they hunted man, he had no idea. Personally, he had not so much pursued an individual as he had hunted a certain smell. In coming upon the sleeping Italian he had tracked down this particular smell. His conception of his duty was, having tracked the smell to man, to hand the man over to Dick. That marked for him the end of his work; but not by any means the end of his interest in the upshot of it.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FIGHT ON THE PRAIRIE

EVEN without the confession he ultimately made, Jan's tracking, the man's own empty leather sheath fitting the dagger he had left behind him, and the watch, money and rings found in his pockets, and proved to be the property of the murdered couple, would have been sufficient to condemn the Italian.

It appeared that the primary motive of the crime had not been theft, but jealousy. At all events, the man's own story was that he had been the lover of the woman he had killed. He paid the law's last penalty within the confines of the R.N.W.M.P. Barracks; and his capture and trial made Jan for the time the most famous dog in Saskatchewan. Pictures of him appeared in newspapers circulating all the way from Mexico to the Yukon; and in his walks abroad with Dick Vaughan he was pointed out as "the North-West Mounted Police bloodhound," and credited with all manner of wonderful powers.

It was natural, of course, that he should be called a bloodhound; and it did not occur to any one in Regina that his height, his fleetness, and his shaggy black and iron-grey coat were anything but typical of the bloodhound.

With one exception every man in the R.N.W.M.P. headquarters was proud of Jan. Even the different barrack dogs were conscious of some great addition to the big hound's prestige. The senior officers of the corps went out of their way to praise and pet Jan, and Captain Arnutt had a light steel collar made for him, with a shining plated surface, a lock and key, and an inscription reading thus—

"Jan, of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, Regina."

But Jan's triumph earned him the mortal hatred of one man, and the deference shown to him in barracks added bitterness to the jealous antipathy already inspired by him in the hard old heart of Sourdough. Sergeant Moore said nothing, but hate glowed in his sombre eyes whenever they lighted upon Jan's massive form.

"I believe he'd stick a knife in Jan, if he dared," said French, the man of Devon. "You take my tip, Dick, and keep Jan well out of the sergeant's way. The man's half crazed. His old Sourdough is all he's got in the world for chick or child, and he'll never forgive your dog for doing what Sourdough couldn't do."

"Oh, well," said Dick, with a tolerant smile, "I think he's too much of a man to try and injure a good dog."

"An' that's precisely where you get left right away back," said O'Malley. "I tell ye that blessed sergeant wouldn't think twice about giving Jan a dose of poison if he thought he could get away with the goods. And if he can teach Sourdough to kill Jan, I reckon he'd sooner have that than a commission any day in the week.

Man, you should watch his face when he sees the dog. There's murder in it."

It was a fact that the praises showered upon Jan, the publicity given to his doings, and, above all, the respect shown for the big hound within R.N.W.M.P. circles, were the cause of real wretchedness to Sergeant Moore. When a man who is well on in middle life becomes so thoroughly isolated from friendly human influences as Sergeant Moore was, his mind and his emotions are apt to take queer twists and turns, his judgment to become strangely warped, his vision and sense of proportion to assume the highly misleading characteristics of convex and concave mirrors, which distort outrageously everything they reflect.

Sourdough, like his master, was dour, morose, forbidding, and a confirmed solitary. He was also a singularly ugly and unattractive creature, whom no man had ever seen at play. But prior to Jan's arrival, he had been the unquestioned chief and master among R.N.W.M.P. dogs.

"Surly old devil, Sourdough," men had been wont to say of him; "but, by gee, there's no getting around him; you can't fool Sourdough. He'd go for a grizzly, if the grizzly wouldn't give him the trail. Aye, he's a hard case, all right, is Sourdough. You can't haze him."

And Sergeant Moore, without ever moving a muscle in his mahogany face (all the skin of which was indurated from chin to scalp with the finest of fine-drawn lines) had yet been moved to rare delight by such remarks. He hugged them to him. He gloried in all such tributes to Sourdough's dourness.

"Aye, you're tough, Old-Timer," he had been heard to growl to his dog; "you're a hard case all right. There isn't a soft hair on you, is there, Sourdough? And they all know it. They may squeal, but they've got to give trail when Sourdough comes along."

There were times when he would cuff the dog, or snatch his food from him, for the sheer delight of hearing the beast snarl—as he always would—at his own master.

"What a husky!" he would say in an ecstasy of admiration. "You'd go for me if I gave you half a chance, wouldn't you, Sourdough? And I don't blame you, you old tough."

And now it seemed the barracks had no time to note Sourdough's implacable sourness; everybody was too busy praising that sleek, well-groomed brute from England, of whom the sergeant thought very much as some savage oldtimers think of tenderfeet and remittance men, but with a deal more of bitterness in his contempt.

"But Sourdough will spoil your fine coat for you, my gentleman, the first time you come in our way," the sergeant would mutter to himself, when he chanced to see Dick giving Jan his morning brush down after Paddy was groomed.

He had been foiled half-a-dozen times in his attempts to get Sourdough into Paddy's stall when Jan was there, and Dick Vaughan engaged in any way elsewhere. It seemed that some of Dick's comrades were always on hand to bar the way; and, for appearances' sake, the sergeant could not have it said that he had deliberately

brought about a fight between his dog and the valued hound of an officer, who was everybody's favourite.

"They're afraid, Sourdough, that's what it is; they're afraid you might chew up the overgrown brute, and spit him out in scraps about the yard. Let 'em wait. We'll give 'em something to be afraid of presently."

He meant it, and he kept his word.

Since the Italian murder case, a regular craze had developed among the men for trailing, and the education of dogs. The barrack dogs were constantly being added to, and every man who owned or could obtain a dog gave his leisure to attempts—largely unsuccessful—at training the animal to track.

O'Malley was one of the first to succumb to the new diversion, and was lavishing immense care and patience upon the education of a cross-bred Irish terrier, who would soon be able to wipe the eye of any Sassenach dog in Canada, so he would! Meanwhile O'Malley, conveniently forgetful of Jan's English nationality, was fond of borrowing the big hound for an hour or so together to help him in his education efforts on behalf of Micky Doolan, the terrier. In such a matter Dick Vaughan and Jan were equally approachable and good-natured. Indeed, the pair of them had already done more than any of the different pupils' masters in the matter of this revival of schooling among the barrack dogs.

It happened, towards four o'clock of a late autumn day, that Dick Vaughan was engaged in Regina in attendance upon a great personage from Ottawa. O'Malley, having borrowed Jan's services as helper, was busy giv-

ing tracking lessons to Micky Doolan on the prairie, half a mile from barracks. Chancing to look up from his work, O'Malley saw Sergeant Moore approaching on foot, with Sourdough (as ever) at his heels. He did not know that the sergeant had been watching him through binoculars from the barracks, and that he had spent a quarter of an hour in carefully devised efforts to exacerbate the never very amiable temper of Sourdough.

O'Malley swore afterwards that as the sergeant drew level with little Micky Doolan (a dozen paces or so from the Irishman), he whispered to Sourdough, and "sooled him on."

"Tsss—sss! To him, then lad," is what O'Malley vowed the sergeant said.

Be that as it may, Sourdough did wheel aside, as his way was, and administer a savage slash of his fangs upon poor little Micky's neck. As O'Malley rushed forward to protect his pet, the game little beast, instead of slinking back from tyrant Sourdough, a tribute that hard case demanded from every dog he met, sprang forward with a snarl, and a plucky attempt to return the unsolicited bite he had received.

"Come in, come in, ye little fool!" yelled O'Malley.

But he was too late. A light of malevolent joy gleamed in the big husky's red eyes as he plunged upon the terrier. One thrust of his mighty shoulder sent the little chap spinning on his back, and there was the throat-hold exposed to Sourdough's practised fangs. His bitter temper had been carefully inflamed in advance, and demanded now the sacrifice of blood, warm life-blood. His wide

jaws flashed in upon the terrier's throat just as O'Malley's boot took him in the rear.

"If ye touch that dog again, my man, I'll break your jaw for you," came from the sergeant in a hoarse growl.

Now O'Malley was a disciplined man, and the sergeant was his official superior. But, as it happened, the matter was now taken out of his hands. Jan, who, before the sergeant's arrival, had been lying stretched in the dust thirty paces distant, had risen then and stood stiffly, watching Sourdough with raised hackles. At the moment that the husky's fangs touched the skin of Mickey's throat, Jan was upon him like a battering-ram, shoulder to shoulder, with an impact that sent the husky rolling, all four feet in the air, a position in which no barrack dog had ever before seen Sourdough, and one in which any of them would have given a day's food to find him. For that is the one position in which even a Sourdough may with safety be attacked.

But Jan apparently (and very recklessly) scorned to avail himself of this splendid opportunity. His own great weight and swiftly silent movement had been responsible for Sourdough's complete downfall. And now, while O'Malley grabbed his terrier in both arms, thankful the little beast's throat was whole, Jan stood stiff-legged, with stiffly arched neck and bristling hackles, glaring down at Sourdough, with the expression which, among pugilistic schoolboys, goes with the question: "Have you had enough?"

"Enough!" Any such question could but prove abysmal ignorance of Sourdough's quality. The big husky was

not scratched, and of fighting he could hardly be given enough while his heart continued to beat. Before, he had been angered. Before, he had loathed and hated Jan. And now Jan had rolled him over on his back as though he were a helpless whelp. Jan had glared menacingly at him, at Sourdough, while he, the acknowledged canine master and terror of that countryside, had all four feet in the air. A flame of hatred surged about the husky's heart. His snarl as he bounded to his feet was truly awe-inspiring. His writhen lips drew up and back crescent-wise over red gums, showing huge yellow fangs and an expression of most daunting ferocity.

In the next moment he tore a groove six inches long down Jan's left shoulder, scooping out skin and fur as a machine saw might have done it; and in the same second he was away again, wolf-like, his steel muscles already contracting for the next attack.

Now Jan had no thought of fighting when he bowled Sourdough over. His sole preoccupation had been the rescue of his little friend, Micky Doolan, from what looked like certain death. Contact with Sourdough had greatly stirred the combatant blood in him, as had also the hated smell of the husky. Even then a call from Dick Vaughan would have met with instant response from Jan. But there was no Dick Vaughan in sight. Sergeant Moore stood gazing eagerly, a little anxiously even, but with no hint of any thought of interfering with the meeting he had schemed to bring about. O'Malley, clutching his terrier in his arms, was rather distractedly calling—

"Come away in, Jan! Drop it now, Jan! Come in here, come in here, Jan!"

But O'Malley, after all, though an amiable person enough, and, as a friend of Dick's, a man to be obeyed cheerfully enough in the ordinary way, yet was not Dick. He was hardly a shadow of the sovereign. And then came that fiery stroke that had opened a groove down Jan's left shoulder.

After that, it is a moot point whether even Dick Vaughan's voice would have served to penetrate the cloud of fury in which Jan moved. He became very terrible in his wrath. One saw less of the bloodhound and more, far more, of his sire, of royal Finn, the fighting wolf-hound of the Tinnaburra ranges, in his splendid pose, in the upward, scimitar curve of his great tail, the rage in his red-hawed eyes, the vibrant defiance of his baying roar.

But he lacked as yet his sire's inimitable fighting craft, just as he lacked entirely the lightning cunning of the half-wolf Sourdough. And before he had touched the husky his sound shoulder had been grooved, and one of his ears badly torn.

It might have been better tactics on Sourdough's part to have made direct for some killing hold, instead of administering these instructive preliminary chastenings. Seeing clearly Jan's inferiority in wolf tactics, Sourdough underrated the forces of his size, weight, endurance, power, and quite indomitable bravery. In fact, the cunning Sourdough was very thoroughly deceived by Jan. Never having in his varied experiences encountered chivalry, nobility, nor yet much gallantry in a dog, he made no allowance for these qualities in Jan. He could not conceive that the attack which had bowled him over

was no more than a generous attempt to save Micky Doolan. And so he thought it was a challenge to combat; and combat, as the husky saw it, meant an effort to kill by any and every means available. In the same way the reckless scorn of himself and of a palpable advantage, which Jan had shown after knocking him over, was a thing not to be comprehended for what it really was by Sourdough. He thought it evidence of weakening, of sudden fear, of terror inspired in Jan by the sight of the thing he had impulsively done.

Yes, Sourdough entirely misread Jan; and he believed now that he had ample time in which to bleed and cripple the big hound by means of his natural wolf tactics, and then to finish off a helpless enemy at leisure. Cunning often does mislead those who possess it. In this case it was responsible for tactics by which, had he but known it, Sourdough presented his enemy with triple-thick armour, and schooled him finely for the task that lay before him.

Sourdough's second slash cost Jan a split ear, but gave him flashlight vision of his fight with Grip in Sussex, with Grip of the wolflike fighting methods. Sourdough's third attack cost Jan a burning groove down his hitherto untouched shoulder; but, by that token, it effectually completed the lesson of attack number two, and brought a final end to the period of Sourdough's really enjoyable fighting. So poorly, then, did Sourdough's cunning serve him, that his fourth attack came near to costing him his life.

With bloody glee in his eyes, and wide-parted drooling

jaws, he darted in to take his fourth cut at Jan, eager for the joyous moment in which the repetition of these slashes should have reduced Jan to ripeness for the killing thrust—the throat-hold. But Jan had learned his lesson. At the psychological fraction of a moment he changed his position, and, instead of passing on comfortably through space after his attack, Sourdough's shoulder met another bigger shoulder, braced like a granite buttress to receive the impact, and the husky reached earth on his side. That rather shook the wind out of him; but that was nothing by comparison with the fact that, in the same moment, Jan's vice-like jaws closed about one side of his neck, close in to the skull where the hair shortened. That was a serious moment, if you like, for Sourdough; for in addition to the huge power of those jaws there was weight—a hundred and fifty pounds of sinew, bone, and rubber-like muscle behind and above the jaws.

A very desperate vigour stirred in Sourdough's limbs as he took the course which is only taken at critical moments. He deliberately turned farther on his back—the position of all others most dreaded—in order to bring his feet into play, his jaws being momentarily helpless. His abdominal muscles were in splendid order. Like a lynx, Sourdough drew in and up his powerful hind-quarters, and, as if they had been a missile launched from a catapult, slashed his two hind feet along Jan's belly, as a carpenter might rip a board down with a chisel.

In that same moment Sergeant Moore stepped forward, with a hoarse cry—

"Here, damme!" he shouted at O'Malley, "you'd better haul off your Captain's dog, or—or mine'll kill him!"

And with a resounding thwack he brought his riding-cane down across Jan's forehead. It was this, rather than his own very serviceable two chisels, that brought the husky sudden release from the grip upon his neck, which, already deep-sunk, had been like to finish his career. The high-crowned shape of Jan's skull, and the soft fineness of the skin and hair that covered it, made him very sensitive to a blow on the head. Also he knew it was a man's attack, and not a dog's. When he saw who the man was, he roared at him very ferociously. And that was the first occasion upon which Jan had ever shown his teeth in real anger to a human.

Had no Sourdough been there, it is hard to say what might have happened. As it was, the sergeant's intervention and Jan's angry response thereto gave Sourdough the opportunity he had longed for. It gave him, in safety, the rush at Jan from the side. It would have availed him little if Jan had seen him coming. But Jan, engaged in threatening his human enemy, saw nothing till the tremendous impact of Sourdough's rush took him off his feet, and the husky got, not precisely the true throat-hold he wanted, but a deadly hold, none the less, in the flesh of Jan's dewlap.

The position of a few seconds earlier had been practically reversed. Jan's blood was running between Sourdough's fangs now—a fiery tonic, and veritable *eau-de-vie* to the husky. Sourdough's catlike tactics—perhaps the best and safest in such a case—were not adopted by Jan,

who never yet had used such a method. With a huge effort the hound managed to twist his body in such a way as to gain foothold for his hind feet; and then, by the exercise of sheer muscular strength, he curved his neck and shoulder inch by inch (while still his blood slaked Sourdough's thirst) until, with sudden swiftness, he was able to grip the husky's near fore-leg between his jaws, just on and below the knee.

Then Jan concentrated his whole being into the service of his jaws. Sourdough gave a cry that was almost a scream, and his jaws flew apart, dripping Jan's blood. Jan's teeth sank a shade deeper. Sourdough pivoted round in agony, snapping at the air, and emitting an unearthly yowling, snarling, grunting cry the while. Jan's teeth locked together, and then were sharply withdrawn, leaving a very thoroughly smashed and punctured fore-leg to dangle by its skin and sinew.

During the past few seconds the sergeant had been raining down blows of his cane on Jan's head. Now O'Malley grabbed Jan by his steel collar.

"By hivens, sergeant!" he spluttered. "If ye'll meet me afterwards without your stripes on, I'll—I'll give ye what Jan here 'd give your bloody wolf, if ye had the honesty to lave 'em to ut."

Jan dragged back momentarily, and—in justice to Sourdough's gameness, be it said—the husky struggled hard from his master's entwining arms to be at the enemy again on three legs. But O'Malley's pleadings were urgent and his right arm strong (the left was curled round Micky Doolan); and so it befell that, whilst Sergeant

Moore remained tending his wounded favourite, O'Malley, leading Jan, whose front was bleeding badly, as were his shoulders and one ear, arrived at the barrack gates just as Dick Vaughan trotted up to them, on his return from duty in Regina.

"My hat!" cried Dick, as he dismounted. "Has he killed the sergeant's dog?"

"He would ha' done, the darlin', if the sergeant had bin a man, in place o' the mad divil he is," replied O'Malley.

CHAPTER XXV

PROMOTION

FOR a week and more after the fight the barracks saw nothing of Sourdough, whose leg was being mended for him in the stable of a veterinary surgeon in Regina. Sergeant Moore would have made no difficulty over spending half his pay upon the care of his beloved husky.

Jan's ills were confined to flesh wounds, and in any case Dick preferred to doctor the big hound himself. The story of the fight, and of Sergeant Moore's not very sporting part therein, was now known to every one in the barracks, with the result that Jan became more than ever the favourite of the force, and the sergeant more than ever its Ishmaelite, against whom every man's hand was turned in thought, if not in deed. It was little Sergeant Moore cared for that. It almost seemed as though he welcomed and thrived upon the antipathy of his kind, even as a normal person prospers upon the love of his fellows. The scowls of his comrades were accepted by the sergeant as a form of tribute; so curiously may a certain type of mind be warped by the influence of isolation.

It was at this stage, when Jan's flesh wounds were no

more than half healed, that Captain Arnutt brought Dick Vaughan the intelligence that, as the result of the Italian murder case and other matters, he was to be promoted to acting-sergeant's rank, and given charge, on probation, of the small post at Buck's Crossing, some sixty odd miles north-west of Regina.

The news brought something of a thrill to Dick, because it had been arranged, by his own suggestion in Sussex, that his promotion to full sergeant's rank should mark the period of quite another probationary term; and here, undoubtedly, was a step towards it. On the other hand, he had formed friendships in Regina; and whilst most of the people in the barracks would be genuinely sorry to lose him, he, for his part, could not contemplate without twinges of regret the prospect of exchanging their society for the isolation of the two-roomed post-house at Buck's Crossing.

"And in some ways it will be just as well for you and Jan to be out of here for a time," said Captain Arnutt. "Sergeant Moore has quite a number of fleas in his bonnet, and you can't afford to come to blows with him —here, anyhow."

"No fear of that, sir," said Dick. "Why, he's nearly twice my age, and——"

"Don't you make any mistake of that sort, my friend. There are limits to any man's self-control. The sergeant may be twice your age; but he's made of steel wire and moose hide, and let me tell you he could give a pretty good account of himself in a ring against any man in Saskatchewan. Then, again, your intentions might be

ever so good, but I wouldn't like to answer for you, or for any other white man, if it comes to being actually tackled by as heavy-handed a hard case as Sergeant Moore. And then there's Sourdough. When that husky's leg is sound again, he'll be about as safe a domestic pet as a full-grown grizzly, No, it's better you should be away for a bit. Also, my friend, it's a chance for you. There are some pretty queer customers pass along that Buck's Crossing trail these days, making north. Your beat's a long one. You'll have a good deal of responsibility; and, who knows? You might win a commission out of it. You won't be forgotten here, you know."

Then the order came that Dick was to take over the Buck's Crossing post that same week. It was necessary for Dick to ride the whole sixty odd miles, but his kit was to be sent thirty-two miles by rail, and there picked up by wagon for the remainder of the journey. Meantime there were a number of stitches in Jan's dewlap and shoulders not yet ripe for removal, and Dick decided that he would not ask the hound to cover sixty-five miles of trail in a day, as he meant to do. Therefore it was arranged that O'Malley should see to putting Jan on the train where Dick's kit was sent off, and that Jan should have a place in the wagon for the thirty odd miles lying between Buck's Crossing and its nearest point of rail.

And then, having seen to these arrangements, Dick bade good-bye to his comrades, rubbed Jan's ears and told him to be a good lad till they met again, in forty-eight hours' time, and rode away, carrying with him the

good wishes of every one in the barracks, with the exception of one who looked out at him from the windows of the sergeants' quarters, with grimly nodding head, and a singularly baleful light in his eyes.

Sergeant Moore, who had just returned from three days' leave, had learned from the veterinary surgeon that morning that Sourdough must always limp a little on his near fore-leg, which would be permanently a little shorter than its fellow, by reason of the slight twist which surgical care had been unable to prevent. Yet Sergeant Moore, for all the glow of hatred in his eyes as he watched Dick Vaughan's departure, nodded his grizzled head with the air of a man quite satisfied.

"So long, Tenderfoot," he growled. "You'll maybe find Sourdough's reach a longer one than you reckon for, I'm thinking."

It was evident that day, to O'Malley and to all his friends, that Jan felt the temporary parting with his lord and master a deal more than Dick had seemed to feel it. And yet Jan could not possibly have known, any more than Dick knew, as to what the promised forty-eight hours of separation were to bring forth.

CHAPTER XXVI

JAN GOES ON HIS TRAVELS

JAN spent that night beside O'Malley's bunk, in the face of regulations to the contrary.

In the absence of Paddy from his stall, the good-hearted O'Malley had not liked to leave Jan to the solitude of his bench. And shortly after daylight next morning, with a new steel chain purchased for this journey, attached to his collar, Jan was put on board the west-bound train consigned to Lambert's Siding, for wagon carriage, with Dick's kit, to Buck's Crossing. Jan did not like this business at all. The chain humiliated him, and the train was an abomination in his eyes. But at the back of his mind was a dim consciousness that he was going to his sovereign, and by his sovereign's will, and that was sufficient to prevent any sort of protest on his part.

Arrived at Lambert's Siding, Jan's chain was fastened to a post by a humorous person in greasy overalls, who said, as he noted the fine dignity of Jan's appearance—

"Guess your kerridge will be along shortly, me lord."

The man in the overalls was a new hand transferred from the east, and but lately settled in Canada, or he might probably have recognized Jan as "the R.N.W.M.P. bloodhound," of newspaper celebrity.

A few minutes later a man in a fur cap drove up to the siding in a light buckboard wagon, with a lot of sacking in its tray.

"Has Sergeant Vaughan's dog come from Regina," asked the newcomer.

"Yep, I guess that's him," said Overalls.

"Well, I'm to pay his freight an' take him, and a wagon will call for the other truck."

"That so?" rejoined Overalls, with indifference. "Well, I told me lord his kerridge would be along shortly. Jest give us yer auto here, will yer? Third line down. Hold on. Ye'd better have a receipt for the money. Where's that blame pen?"

The first light snow of the season began to flutter down from out a surprisingly clear sky, as Jan settled down in the buckboard, his chain passed out through a hole and secured to the step outside, an arrangement which struck Jan as highly unnecessary, since it kept his head so low that he could not stand up in the wagon. However, Overalls and the man in the fur cap (who had signed his name as Tom Smith) seem to think it all right, and so friendly Jan, his mind full of thoughts of Dick Vaughan, accommodated himsef docilely to the position, and was soon quite a number of miles away from Lambert's Siding.

When the Buck's Crossing wagon arrived there an hour or so later, its driver seemed surprised that there was no dog for him to carry with Sergeant Vaughan's kit. But he was not a man given to speculation. He just grunted, expectorated, and said shortly—

"Well, I guess that's right, then. Muster made some other arrangement; an' it's just as well, for I'm late an' I've got to have my near front wheel off an' doctor it a bit, so I won't make the Crossin' till midday to-morrow, I reckon. I'll be campin' at Lloyd's to-night."

Overalls just nodded as he took the wagoner's signature for Sergeant Vaughan's kit; and without another thought both men dismissed from their rather vacant minds (as was perfectly natural, no doubt) all further thought of a matter which did not concern them, despite its life and death importance to the son of Finn and Desdemona.

After perhaps an hour and a half, the buckboard was pulled up in a fenced yard beside a small homestead. Here Jan parted with the man in the fur cap and never set eyes upon him again. His chain was now taken by a different sort of man; a very lean, spare, hard-bitten little man, with bright dark eyes and a leather-coloured face. He thanked the fur-capped man for having kindly brought Jan along. Fur cap deprecated thanks but accepted a dollar. And then the leather-faced man led Jan away. They walked for perhaps a couple of miles, and then they were joined by another man, who called the first man Jean, so that Jan looked up quickly, thinking he had been addressed.

"Hees name Jan," explained the first man casually, pointing to Jan's collar.

"H'm! That so? Better get rid o' that collar, Jean, eh?"

From a bag in the buggy in which they had found the second man, wire-cutters were produced, and Jan's collar

cut in sunder and removed, after a leather collar had been buckled on in its place and the chain attached to that. Jan had a vague feeling of uneasiness about this operation; but only a vague feeling. Like all other animal folk, he had long ago arrived at the conclusion that men-folk frequently did quite unaccountable things; that a dog would have no rest in life if he set himself to puzzle out a reason for everything he saw the sovereign people do. Captain Arnutt had locked that collar about his neck, and a very silly, stiff and awkward contraption he had thought it. Now another man, equally without apparent rhyme or reason, took it off and substituted a leathern collar with a queer, fishy, gamy sort of smell. Well, it would make little odds to Jan; if only these people would hurry up about taking him to his own man.

Thinking of that, Jan quite gladly made the best of the very cramped quarters given him in the buggy, though he grew desperately tired of those same quarters before night fell, and he was transferred to the more roomy dog-box of a Canadian Northern train. Without doubt the train would take him direct to Dick. (Until the previous day, his sole experience of trains in Canada had been closely connected with Dick.) So confident was Jan of this, that he bent himself quite cheerfully to the task of tearing and eating the lump of meat given him by Jean before the train started. Evidently this Jean was a friendly, well-disposed sort of a person, and in any case any man at all engaged in taking Jan to Dick Vaughan deserved ready obedience and respect.

In some such way Jan reflected what time the C.N.R.

train by which he travelled rumbled swiftly along its course for Edmonton; and Dick Vaughan, away back in Buck's Crossing, wondered what might be delaying the wagoner from Lambert's Siding; the wagoner he was not to see before the middle of the next day, and then only to learn that the man knew nothing of Jan's whereabouts.

When Jan left that train in the big crowded dépôt at Edmonton next day, winter had descended upon the greater part of North America. The change was the more marked for Jan by reason that snow had come to Edmonton a full day earlier than it came to Lambert's Siding. Jan had seen snow before, on the Sussex Downs; but that had been a kind of snow quite different from this. That snow had been soft and clammy. This was crisp and dry as salt. Also the air was colder than any air Jan had ever known, though mild enough for northern winter air, seeing that the thermometer registered only some five-and-twenty degrees of frost. And the sun shone brightly. There was no wind. It was an air rich in kindling, stimulating properties; an air that made life, movement and activity desirable for all, and optimistic determination easy and natural for most folk.

"By gar!" said Jean to his friend Jake, as together they led Jan from the train. "You mark me now, what I say, thees Jan he's got all them huskies beat before he start. Eh? Hee's great dog, thees Jan."

Jake nodded, and the three of them strode on through the dry powdery snow. One knew by their walk that these men had covered great distances on their feet. Their

knees swung easily to every stride, with a hint of the dip that comes from long use of snow-shoes. For a little while Jan hardly thought of Dick Vaughan, so busy was he in absorbing new impressions. But when the walk had lasted almost an hour, he began again to wonder about Dick, and his deep-pouched eyes took on once more the set look of waiting watchfulness which meant that he was hoping, at any moment, to sight his man.

And then they came to a small wooden house with a large barn and a sod-walled stable beside it. Jan's chain was hitched round a stout centre post in the barn, and there he was left. Later Jean brought him a tin dish of water and a big lump of dried fish, which had had some warm fat smeared over it, Jean having rightly guessed that it was Jan's first experience of this form of dog food. The fat was well enough, and Jan licked it rather languidly. But the fish did not appeal to him, and so he left it and went off to sleep, little thinking that he would get no other kind of food than this for many days to come.

Towards the middle of the next day, Jan, feeling cramped and rather miserable as the result of his unaccustomed confinement, changed his mind about that fish and ate it; slowly, and without enjoyment, but yet with some benefit to himself. Less than an hour later Jean entered to him, carrying in his hands a contrivance of leather, with long trailing ends.

For a minute or so Jean stood looking down upon Jan, appraisingly. There was no better judge of a dog—from one standpoint—in that part of Canada.

"By gar!" he muttered between his teeth. "That Sergeant Moore hee's a queer cuss, sure 'nuff, to give away a dog like thees for nothing; and then, by gar, to pay me ten dollar for takin' heem."

Then he stooped down and rubbed Jan's ears, with a friendly, knowledgeable way he had.

"Ah, you, Jan," he said cheerily. "Here's your harness. Here, good dog, I show you."

And he proceeded to buckle a set of dog harness about Jan's massive chest and shoulders. In doing so he noticed for the first time, Dick's stitches in the hound's dewlap and shoulders.

"By gar!" he said, with a grin. "You bin fightin', Jan, eh? Ah! well, take care, Jan. We get no nursin' after fightin' here. Bes' leave that job to the huskies, Jan. Come on—good dog."

A hundred yards away on the far side of the shack, Jan came upon the first dog-sled he had ever seen, with a team of seven dogs attached, now lying resting on the dry snow. They were a mixed team, four of them unmistakable huskies, one with collie characteristics, one having Newfoundland blood (through many crosses), and one, the leader, having the look of something mid-way between a big powerful Airedale and an old English sheep-dog, including the bob-tail. This leader, Bill, as he was called, had the air of a master worker, and was the only member of the pack (except the wheeler) who did not snarl as Jan was led towards them.

With the dogs was Jake, wearing a deep fur cap that came well down over the tops of his ears. In one hand

Jake held a short-hafted whip with a raw-hide thong, the point of which he could put through a dog's coat from ten paces distant.

"Take Mixer out an' put heem in behind Bill," said Jean. "We'll try Jan in front of old Blackfoot."

It was not without thought, and kindly thought, that Jean ordered this arrangement, for Blackfoot, though old and scarred, a trail-worn veteran, had not a spark of unkindness in his composition. He was the dog with Newfoundland blood in him, who, like Bill the leader, and unlike the rest of the pack, had not snarled at sight of Jan. He even held out a friendly muzzle in welcome as, rather reluctantly, Jan allowed himself to be led to his place in front of Blackfoot. The husky who filled the next forward place wheeled about as far as he could in the traces and snapped viciously at Jan.

"Ah, Snip!" said Jean quite pleasantly. But even as he spoke, so pleasantly, the whip he had picked up sang, and its thong, doubled, landed fair and square in Snip's face, causing that worthy to whirl back to his place with a yowl of consternation.

Jan was just beginning to think that he had put up with enough of this sort of thing, and that he would leave these men and their dogs altogether, when he heard a peremptory order given by Jean, and felt himself jerked forward by means of the harness he wore. In the same moment Blackfoot's teeth nipped one of his hocks from behind, not savagely, but yet sharply, and he bounded forward till checked by the proximity of Snip's stern. He had no wish to touch Snip. But Snip also was bounding

forward it seemed. So Jan thrust out his fore-feet and checked. Instantly two things happened. A whip-lash curled painfully round his left shoulder, crossing one of his newly healed wounds. And again came a nip at one of his hocks, a sharper nip this time, and one that drew two spots of blood.

"Mush, Jan! Mush on there!" said Jean firmly, but not harshly; and again the whip curled about Jan's shoulders as, puzzled, humiliated, hurt, and above all bewildered, he plunged forward again in the traces, and heard Jean mutter behind him—

"Good dog, thees Jan. By gar, hee's good dog."

And that was how the new life, the working life, began for Jan, the son of Finn and Desdemona.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RULE OF TRACE AND THONG

FROM this point there began for Jan a life so strangely, wildly different from anything he had ever known or suspected to exist, that only a dog of exceptionable fibre and stamina—in character as well as physique—could possibly have survived transition to it from the smooth routines which Jan had so far known.

To begin with it was a life in which all days alike were full of toil, of ordered, unremitting work. And until it began, Jan had never done an hour's work in his life. (In England, outside the sheep-dog fraternity and a few of the sporting breeds, all dogs spend their lives in unordered play, uncontrolled loafing, and largely superfluous sleeping.)

But this, vital and far-reaching in effect though it proved, was but one part of the change. Jan and his present companions of the trace were perforce so keenly and intensely alive—even during their sleeping hours—that by comparison, much of Jan's previous life in the world might be described as a sort of coma. In that comparatively soft and dreamlike state, a dog became more or less interestedly conscious of things when they happened. In this present tense and arduous life on the snow, things belonged to the past by the time they hap-

pened. Consciousness always anticipated them and directed action accordingly. A dog had to lead his life instead of following it. Momentary relaxation of this intense and anticipatory eagerness of living brought almost certain suffering. Anything like continued relaxation meant certain death.

As dogs go, in the world of civilization, Jan had not been reckoned dainty in the matter of food. Compared with Bill and Mixer, Snip, Blackfoot, Tough, Grit, Speedy and their like, he had been always incredibly an epicure, insanely nice. Now by the swiftness of his ascent —or descent—to complete and resourceful adaptability, he demonstrated his fitness to survive, where perhaps nine out of ten dogs of his upbringing would have succumbed.

The Lady Desdemona, his mother, for example, would certainly not have lived through a month of Jan's present life; very possibly not a week. Finn would have endured it much longer, because of his experiences in Australia, his knowledge of the wild kindred and their ways. But even Finn, despite his huge strength and exceptional knowledge, would have not come through this ordeal so well as Jan did, unless it had come to him as early in life as it came to Jan. And even then his survival would have been doubtful. The difference between the climates of Australia and the North-West Territory is hardly greater than the difference in stress and hardness between Finn's life in the Tinnaburra ranges, as leader of a dingo pack, and Jan's life in North-West Canada as learner in a sled team.

The physical strength of Finn, the wolfhound, in whose veins ran the unmixed blood of many generations of wolfhound champions, might have been equal to the strain of Jan's new life. But his pride, his courtliness, his fine gentlemanliness, would likely have been the death of him in such a case. He would have died nobly, be sure of that. But it is likely he would have died. Now in the case of Jan, whilst he had inherited much of his sire's fine courtesy, much of his dam's noble dignity, yet these things were not so vitally of the essence of him as they were of his parents. They were a part of his character, and they had formed his manners. But they were not Jan.

The essential Jan was an immensely powerful hound of mixed blood, reared carefully, trained intelligently and well, and endowed from birth with a tremendously keen appetite for life; a keener appetite for life than falls to the lot of any champion-bred wolfhound or bloodhound. Jan was a gentleman rather than a fine gentleman; before either he was a hound, a dog; and before all else he was a master and lover of his life. And since, by the arrangement of Sergeant Moore, "Tom Smith," Jean and Jake, he had to take his place between Snip and Blackfoot in a sled team, it was well, exceedingly well, for Jan that these things were thus and not otherwise.

Jan's supper on the evening of his first day in the traces, was a meal he never forgot. The slab of dried fish Jean tossed to him was half as big again as the pieces given to the other dogs. For Jean—a just and not unkindly man in all such matters—well recognized that Jan

was very much bigger and heavier than the average husky. (Jan was three and a half inches higher at the shoulder, and forty to fifty pounds heavier and more massive than any of his team-mates.) His previous night's supper Jan had eaten that morning. Still, the afternoon's work, in some thirty or forty degrees of frost, had put an edge on his appetite, and he tackled the fish—which two days before he would have scorned—with avidity.

He had swallowed one mouthful and was about to tear off another, when Snip intervened with a terrifying snarl between Jan and his food. Jan, who was learning fast, turned also with a snarling growl to ward off Snip's fangs. And in that moment—it was no more than a moment—Bill, the leader, stole and swallowed the whole remainder of Jan's supper.

Jean was watching this, and did not try to prevent it. But leaving Jan to settle with Snip, he descended upon Bill with his whip, double-thonged, and administered as sound a trouncing to that hardy warrior as any member of the team had ever received. That ended, Jean swung on his heel and gave Snip the butt of the whip-handle across the top of his nose, and this so shrewdly that Snip's muzzle ached for twenty-four hours, reminding him, every minute of the time, that he must not harry Jan—while his master was in sight.

It would have been easy for Jean to have spared another ration of fish for Jan, since in a few more days they would reach a Hudson Bay post at which fresh supplies were to be taken in. But Jean was too wise for this. He preferred that Jan should go hungry because he

wanted Jan to learn quickly. Jan educated meant dollars to Jean, and a good many of them. Jan uneducated, or learning but slowly, would, as Jean well knew, very soon mean Jan dead—a mere section of dog-food worth no dollars at all. So Jean laughed at the big hound.

"You see, Jan," he said. "You watch um, Jan, an' learn queek—eh? Yes, I think you learn queek."

This Jean was a man whose character would have puzzled the pundits of civilization. Some (quite charitable) in the Old World, and in the lands to the southward of that still older world in which Jan now travelled, would in all sincerity have pronounced Jean wholly and unredeemedly vile, on the strength of several facts about his life regarding which Jan and the other dogs knew less than nothing, and the men of Jean's acquaintance cared as little. Yet Jan grew quickly to like and respect Jean. And Jake, like many another north-man who had to do with Jean, trusted and respected him.

The outstanding thing about Jean was his competence. He was an able man. He was essentially fit, inasmuch that he survived where very many of his kind would have gone under. Morals, as these are understood in milder climes and surroundings, he had none. Courtesy, as most of us understand it, he merely despised; decency also in many respects. Mercifulness, pity, gentleness, tenderness, scruples, and what we call the sense of honour: all these were entirely absent from Jean's composition. If he had known any of them in youth, he had forgotten them during the fight which manhood had meant for him. And if he scorned honesty as we understand it, and had for-

gotten the other attributes of our civilized decency, his life was very largely a defiance of all those other statutory restraints which we call the Law. Jean's only law was never to be beaten, and always, so far as he could, to make a monetary profit out of everything he did.

As a runner and carrier for the owners of illicit stills, he had few equals and no superiors. As a man to carry through any difficult and dangerous enterprise which no respecter of the Law would undertake at all, Jean had, in the course of years, acquired a notable reputation. He was not "above" anything, unless, perhaps, cowardice or any form of "quitting." And among the goods he trafficked in and carried over the snow and ice of trackless wilds in which a man must have a good deal of the cunning and hardihood of a wolf to survive at all, were, for example, pictures, photographs, which no man of decent cleanly instincts (as these are understood among the civilized) would be seen handling with a pair of tongs. You could not conceive of any undertaking which Jean would decline as "dirty work," providing he could see dollars in it, and you could not possibly baffle or puzzle him—between 55° and 65° North.

Jean won the respect of his associates—men and dogs—because he was able. And Jan found, in the new life upon which he had entered, that this was the one and only thing demanded of man or dog: that he should be able; that he should never "quit" or give out. There was nothing else demanded; but there was a good deal in this demand. For one thing it admitted of no hesitancy and no mistakes; any more than driving a hundred horse-

power motor car at a hundred miles an hour admits of hesitancy or mistakes. In this life the man or dog who hesitated was generally lost, and he who made a mistake invariably suffered for it shrewdly. To make the same mistake twice, or to have a habit of making mistakes, was merely fatal.

Thus in that little matter of the daily meal, if Jan had gone on making the mistake he made on his first night in the wilderness, not all Jean's authority could have saved him. The rest of the team, by hook or crook, would have kept him foodless and killed him outright long before the slower process of starvation could have released him. But his first lesson sufficed for Jan. When his next supper came, he had done a day and a half's work, he had lived and exerted himself more in that day and a half than during any average month of his previous life. As a consequence, when Bill and Snip looked round for Jan's supper, after bolting their own, they saw a great hound with stiff legs and erect hackles, alert in every hair of his body—but no supper. The supper, very slightly masticated and swallowed with furious haste, was already beginning its task of helping to stiffen Jan's fibres, and give fierceness to the lift of his upper lip.

But that was far from being the end of the lesson. In point of size, and in other ways, Jan was exceptional. He needed more than the other dogs; and because he needed more, and had the sort of personality which makes for survival, he got more. Jean gave him more than was given to the others. But that was not enough. Jan was so hungry, what with his strivings in the traces, and the

novelty for him of this life of tense unceasing effort and alertness, that his appetite was as a thorn in his belly and as a spur to his ingenuity and enterprise.

It is the law of the sled-dog that you shall not steal your trace-mates' grub. Jan broke this law wherever he saw the glint of a chance to do so; that is, wherever he could manage it by force of fang and shoulder, or by cunning—beyond the range of the whip. He did more. He stole his master's food; not every day, of course, but just as often as extreme cunning and tireless watchfulness enabled him to manage it. He was caught once, and only once, and beaten off with a gee-pole and a club; pretty sorely beaten, too. But—

"Don' mark heem, Jake! Don' touch hees head."

Jean might be ever so angry, but he never lost his temper. He might punish ever so sorely, but he never lost sight of his main objective, and could not be induced to knock dollars off his own property. Incidentally he knew precisely what his aching hunger meant to Jan, and why the big dog stole. But that knowledge did not weigh one atom with Jean in apportioning Jan's food, or his punishment for stealing; both being meted out, not with any view to Jan's comfort, but solely with the aim of protecting the food supply and keeping up Jan's value in dollars. For Jean, before and above all else, was able; a finished product of the quite pitiless wilderness in which he made out, not only to survive where many went under, but in surviving to prosper.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOVERS OF LIFE

WHEN, thirty-two days after his initiation, Jan and his mates pulled into Fort Frontenac (their third place of call), he was by long odds the most valuable member of Jean's team.

Indeed, by reason, first, of his great strength, and next of the remarkable readiness with which he had absorbed his teaching, he was worth any two of the other dogs. Also he had won a certain hard deference from each one of his mates, and he had soundly thrashed the lot of them, excepting Bill, who was able and wise enough to withhold the opportunity from him, and Blackfoot, who had never once from the outset either challenged him, irked him, or shown the slightest doubt about acknowledging his superiority.

At this time Jan weighed eleven pounds less than he had scaled in the Regina barracks, and was thirty per cent stronger than ever in his life before. His hunger, though always present, was no longer as a thorn in his belly. It was no longer an ache, but rather a perpetual stimulus. It did not hurt him now. But it, and other things he had acquired, kept him tuned unfailingly to that high concert pitch of mental, bodily, nervous and instinctive alert-

ness which the northern wilderness demands of all who are to survive its rigours.

There is no dog in all the world of civilization so much alive as Jan was now. From sound sleep he could now flash into defensive action, more swiftly, and with more of measured certainty than is possible to the house dog, as the outcome of his most eagerly watchful preparation. In the matter of the efficiency of the service rendered him by his muscles, and his senses of sight, smell and hearing, there was as much difference between Jan and the average house-dog as there is between the average house-dog and his master. Jan's every separate hair was sentient; he was vividly, tremulously alive in every red corpuscle of the blood that raced so swiftly through his veins.

And, be it said, with all the intensity of Jan's aliveness, there was keen, eager, almost savagely zestful enjoyment of life. If he did not actually enjoy hardship and hunger, it is yet certain that hunger and hardship brought him enjoyment of life. As for his work, his strenuous daily toil in the traces, that he keenly enjoyed for its own sake. His pride in his superior strength, and in the working skill and cunning which he so swiftly developed, was unbounded.

No human and professional dog-musher was ever more severe, more swift in anger, or more pitiless in punishment than Jan, the novice, at the end of his first month as a sled dog. His fury when one of the dogs blundered, shirked, or otherwise caused delay or lack of efficiency in the team work, was a sight to behold. Bill, the leader and acknowledged master of the team, with all his long

and varied experience, was greatly keyed up by Jan. His penalties were apt to be forestalled, unless he used great care. If the defaulter were within reach of Jan's fangs, woe betide the poor beast, for he was like to reap a double punishment: the first a lightning stroke—often to the very bone—from Jan; and than a bitter trouncing from Bill, into which was poured all the venom due to his recognition that the big hound had shamed him by being before him.

The only dog spared by Jan in his frenetic devotion to discipline and efficiency, his wild pride in the team's work, was old Blackfoot. Maybe it was the civilized breeding in Blackfoot, as well as his indomitable amiability, that softened Jan towards him. But it was a strange sight to watch the fiery young hound who, a month before, had never seen a sled, hustling the veteran Blackfoot in his job as wheeler. More than once or twice Jean roared and cursed in his merriment over this sight.

Blackfoot would indulge a moment's laziness, or omit to go wide at a bend, or cause a delay in starting. Jan would whirl round upon him in the traces, literally foaming with anger, leaping at him with snarling jaws wide open, and ferocity spitting from his red-hawed eyes. And then, at the instant of contact, Jan would close his jaws with a snap, and strike the old wheeler only with his muzzle, his shoulder, or at times—like a schoolmaster cuffing an urchin—with one paw. And Blackfoot would obviously apologize, with a quick lick of the shoulder, muzzle or paw that struck him, and turn with penitent energy to his job—a most singular sight. At such a time

Jan's action would twist the whole team into confusion; but woe betide the dog not in his proper place when Jan had finished! He could be certain of a sore skin.

"By gar, hee's masterpiece, that Jan," Jean said many times. "You don' wan' no wheep when Jan's aroun' now, I tell you. Hee's bes' dog-musher I know. Teach heem! Lemme tell you, thees Jan, he teach *me* 'bout drivin' dogs. Hee's masterpiece, thees Jan, by gar!"

And on another occasion: "Lemme tell you, that Beel, he don' lead thees team now. No, *sir*. That Jan, hee's boss. If we keep heem, I put heem in lead nex' month, you see. Lead! That Jan, he lead hees team across the hobs o' hell. Yes, *sir*—an' no stoppin' to pick out cinders, neither. Hee's masterpiece, that dog; 'n I get t'ree hunderd dollars fer heem bimeby; now, you see."

Seen as he paced, stiff-legged, defiant, watchful from nose to tail-tip, through the enclosure at Fort Frontenac, Jan would have been an amazing revelation to the kindly Sussex folk who had known and loved him, back there in the gentle, even life of the Old World. There, to win anything but hospitable affability from Jan, you must have taken very flagrant steps to prove yourself an enemy and an evil-doer. Here, to earn anything better than a lip-lifting, hackle-raising, fang-baring snarl from him, you must first demonstrate past all possibility of doubt your right to approach him as a friend. There, a stranger might have stepped across his body while he slept. Here, a friend could not come within twenty paces of him while he slept, without seeing him spring into watchfully defensive alertness. There, he observed you casually,

amiably, lazily, whether you were man or beast. Here, he anticipated your slightest movement, and seemed to know every fleeting thought that entered your mind, and be prepared in advance for what might come of it.

Scarred from a score of wounds, and inured to a state of being in which, while at work, he must fight to keep others working truly, and when not at work he must fight just as hard for the right to keep on living, Jan loved his life more than he had ever loved it before, and savoured every hour of it gladly. So did every one of his team mates. The zest of life was strong in all of them.

In the world of civilization and especially, perhaps, in England, the sentiments of mankind, whilst for the most part good and kindly, have become overlaid with a sort of lichenous coating of sentimentality. This parasitical growth, apparent in many things, is specially noticeable in the measures it dictates for "the prevention of cruelty to animals." It is perfectly permissible, even creditable, under these measures, to take a dog or any other animal, and inflict, say, six or eight years of utter and humiliating wretchedness upon it, by loading it up several times daily with food it cannot digest, and forbidding it the sort of exercise which would help to counterbalance the resultant ill effects.

You may retain the regard of the most tenderly sensitive people, whilst inflicting chronic dyspepsia and a long-drawn-out paralysis upon a dog, and robbing him of every atom of self-respect and satisfaction in life. But harness him to a go-cart, providing him with a healthy occupation and a diverting interest in life, and, though you

devote great skill to enabling the dog to enjoy the occupation and benefit by it, you shall call down upon your devoted head the thunders of police wrath, and find yourself penalized as a law-breaker. Incidentally you will be looked on with loathing as a cruel, horrid fellow by all the (lichenous) lovers of animals.

The thing is the more curious, when you remember that the folk primarily responsible for it really do love dogs. And mostly they are people who have had opportunities of watching the well-fed, well-groomed, well-set-up dogs in other lands who draw carts. They have observed with interest the waterproof mats on which such working dogs recline while their cart is waiting outside a shop. It would hardly occur to them to carry a mat for their own well-loved dogs to sit on, when left waiting outside a door. And certainly it is a rare thing to find an idle pet dog carrying the sleek condition visible in the majority of working dogs in civilized countries.

But sentimentality has established the law; and so, whilst a drink-sodden hawker may force his wife, or his half-grown son or daughter, to draw him through the streets while he dozes in a barrow, the most scrupulously humane person must not permit his dog to wear harness. The public do not mind a small boy permanently injuring himself by trundling a hundredweight of goods along in all weathers on a bicycle, to earn a few shillings a week. But a Great Dane dog, weighing a hundred and fifty pounds, must never be allowed to pull a go-cart.

The boredom we inflict upon thousands of well-fed dogs in the civilized world amounts to real cruelty; espe-

cially in the cases of the extra humane persons, who, in effect, treat a dog as they might treat a child recovering from some wasting disease. We quite recognize the cruelty of allowing human beings no occupation. But it would be difficult to conceive of any human life, outside a solitary confinement cell, so utterly devoid of interest, occupation, or other basis of zestfulness as the life of, say, a lap-dog or a big dog in some of civilization's most luxurious homes. Such animals are robbed of all interest, even in meals. They literally have no other thing in life to do than to lie down and sleep when they can; to get up and yawn when they must; to eat, if they can, when food—which they have only to swallow, rarely to tear or crunch—is placed before them; and then to lie down again.

Mongrels have a rather better time of course, because they are less cared for. The street cur is nearly always happier than the pedigree dog. But walk down the aisles of a championship dog show, where every animal is a dog of price, and treated always with great "kindness," and note carefully the expressions of the dogs' faces. You shall find no more acute marks of chronic boredom in all the Riviera, or any other haunt of modern gaiety; no, nor even at the most brilliant function of a London season.

CHAPTER XXIX

MUTINY IN THE TEAM

JEAN made sure he would sell Jan at Fort Frontenac. And that he did not was due to accidental causes over which he had no control.

Jean asked three hundred dollars. The would-be buyer —a man pretty nearly as able as Jean himself in northland craft—had only two hundred in cash; but possessed, besides, an invincible objection to owing or borrowing. (Resembling Jean in his knowledge of the wild, he was curiously different in most other ways: having a good deal of sentiment, and a keen, almost conventional, sense of honour.)

"He's worth three hundred, all right," said the man—who hailed from New England—when he had seen Jean at work.

"You bet," said Jean laconically.

"But I just haven't got the money, or he'd be my dog." Jean grinned. "Ah, well, eet's money talks," said he. And on that they parted; for this last talk between them came when Jean's team was pulling out for the northwest, after a profitable little rest-time, in which Jean had exchanged a little rubbish for a lot of good food and a quite considerable wad of dollars.

In accordance with his promise, Jean put Jan in the lead; and it may be doubted if the annals of sled-dogs contain another instance of a dog from the outside world earning such promotion in a single month among huskies and hardened veterans.

There was no sort of doubt Jan had earned it. All his life he had been regarded, rightly enough, as an exceptional dog. In the last month he had shown himself a veritable super-dog; and some of this triumph he probably owed to Dick Vaughan's unusual gifts as a trainer and master of dogs. Something, too, he owed to that other super-hound, Finn; as to Finn's own exceptional life, and as to the instruction he had given his son on the Sussex Downs. Something, too, was due to the Master at Nuthill and to Betty Murdoch, for the splendid constitutional foundation which their well-thought out care had given to Jan. But most of all, perhaps, was owing to the blend which filled his veins of the finest blood (from the finest exemplars) of two distinct breeds of hounds.

It would be a mistake to underrate the part Jean played in the matter of Jan's startling rapid development. Other types of men might in time have taught Jan just as much, given Jean's knowledge and experience of the white world he knew so well. Few could have taught so swiftly. In the wilderness Nature is apt to be quicker and more certain, as an instructor, than most humans. And Jean, aside from his human wickednesses, was very much like Nature in the wilderness. In this particular matter he was better—for Jan. Not by reason of any virtue he

possessed, but because of his appetite for something regarding which Nature is profoundly indifferent—dollars. This appetite urged the preservation of Jan's individual life. Nature does not care a straw for the preservation of any individual life, but only for the continuous progress of the species. Nature would have taught Jan speedily and well. But it is just possible that, at one stage of his education, she might have allowed the piece of life called Jan to pass into another form; by way, it may be, of the belly of some other animal. Jean's preoccupation with the dollar hunt, and his past-mastership of the wiles of north-land life, made of him in this way a rather safer guardian and teacher for Jan than Nature.

But Jean did, on occasion, make mistakes; not vital mistakes, but slips that might injure his pocket. He made one when he put Jan in the lead, and named Bill wheeler, in place of Blackfoot. Jean wanted to make a completely educated dog of Jan as soon as might be. But he did not want to lose Bill—a very useful dog—nor yet to injure Blackfoot's health and efficiency. Bill, as leader reduced to wheeling, made Blackfoot's life a hell upon earth for the kindly wise old dog with Newfoundland blood in him; and that of course was not good for Blackfoot.

But this was not the worst of it. As recognized leader of the team, Bill could endure Jan's officious zeal, and even make shift to suffer the big hound's real supremacy, whilst by craft he could avoid a conflagration. So far, then, Bill had remained a force making for discipline and the working efficiency of the team. As wheeler, he became at one stride a crafty and embittered mutineer;

aiming primarily at Jan's discomfiture, and generally at the disruption of the team as a compact entity. When not occupied in working off his vindictive spleen upon poor Blackfoot, whose hind-quarters he gashed at every opportunity, Bill concentrated all his notable energies upon stirring up disorder, indiscipline, confusion and strife among his mates.

Jean flogged Bill pretty severely; and in the intervals he said—

"Tha's all right, Beell. Jan'll lick all thees outer you, bimeby."

And that was where Jean's mistake lay. Jan could safely be trusted to lick pretty well anything into, or out of, the rest of the team; but there was that in Bill, the ex-leader, which no power on earth would lick out of him. He knew it; and Jan knew it. And that was where, in this one matter, they both saw a little farther than the astute Jean. The thing of it was that what they saw did not trouble either of them. They were content to bide the issue. But had he known of it, Jean would not have been at all content with anything of the sort. Far from it.

In any event the issue involved loss for Jean, since, as both dogs well knew, it meant death for Jan or for Bill. They were quite content in their knowledge. But Jean could not conceivably have found content in any prospect involving himself in monetary loss; for that would have been contrary to the only guiding principles he knew. Pride in his own unfailing knowledge of dogs and life in the north helped to make Jean establish Jan as leader of the team. But if he could have foreseen monetary loss

in the arrangement, his pride had assuredly been called down, and Bill re-established in the lead.

Jean saw that Jan made an exceptionally fine leader. There was no sort of doubt about it. He set a tremendously high working standard, and hustled the team into accepting it by the exercise of an almost uncannily far-seeing severity. Nothing escaped him, least of all a hint of any kind of shirking. He was quicker than Jean's whip, more sure, and more compelling. But whilst Jean saw this, and more, with genuine admiration for Jan, and for his own astuteness in foretelling this exceptional capacity and acquiring ownership of the hound, he also saw, with angry puzzlement, that his team was falling off in condition and efficiency as a unit.

It was not that the leader lacked either justice or discretion in his fiery severity. Jan displayed both to a miracle. But the team had to live between his severity while at work, and Bill's bitter and tireless persecution and crafty incendiarism outside the traces. Over all, for their consolation, were the whips of the masters. But so infernally crafty was Bill, that he never once allowed the masters to detect the real wickedness of the part he played. They could see poor Blackfoot's bleeding hocks: "We got to call heem Redleg soon. Damn that Beel!"—but they could not see Bill's continuous crafty incitements to mutiny, or the hundred-and-one ways in which he strove, when out of harness, to work up hatred of Jan among his mates, or when in harness, to play subtle tricks which should produce an effect discreditable to the new leader.

Intuitively Jan became aware of most of these things. But even where he detected Bill at fault, he could not trounce the ex-leader as he trounced the other dogs, because he and Bill both knew very well that there could be no sparring, no such lightsome thing as mere chastisement between them. There was war to the death in Bill's snarl when Jan so much as looked at him. He was perfectly certain he could, and would, kill Jan directly a suitable opportunity offered. Jan was not so sure about that; but he did know very well that he was not capable of just thrashing Bill, and letting it go at that; for over and above Bill's unbeaten prowess as a fighter and master dog, there was a mortal hatred in him where Jan was concerned; a hatred which, weighed as a fighting asset, was almost equivalent to a second set of fangs.

And then came the memorable evening upon which Jean killed a bull-moose and all the team fed full—except Bill.

CHAPTER XXX

THE FEAST AND THE FASTER

JEAN and Jake were not out on a hunting expedition, and if it had involved hunting, the probabilities are Jean would never have bagged that bull-moose. But it happened that, when his sharp eyes sighted the moose in mid-afternoon, the poor beast had just managed to break one of its fore-legs in a deep hole masked by snow. It was practically a sitting shot for Jean, and that at a range which made missing impossible for such a man.

The dogs were wild with excitement, but fortunately they were still in the traces and anchored to a laden sled. In spite of this there was something of a stampede among them until Jean made it clear that he meant the team to remain in harness for the present. Then the masters' whips, backed by policeman Jan's remorseless fangs, soon had order reestablished. And this was as well, for at that particular juncture Jean and Jake were travelling fairly light, and a strong team can quickly work serious damage by stampeding among trees with a light sled.

When Jean had examined the moose, he decided to avail himself of the magnificent supply of fresh food it offered, and to carry on as large a share of the meat when frozen as the sled would take. To this end he and

Jake decided to camp for the night at a spot no more than a few hundred paces away from the dead moose. The dogs were too much excited to lie down in their traces. (It was many weeks since any of them had tasted flesh meat, and though dried salmon makes an excellent working dietary, it is of course a very different thing from fresh meat with blood in it.) So they stood and sat erect, with parted jaws all drooling, while Jean and Jake set to work with their long knives on the great carcass.

The cutting up of a full-grown moose is no light task, and darkness had fallen before the two men had finished stowing away all the heavy frozen strips of moose-meat the sled could carry. Then having removed the choicest portions for their own use for that night and the next day, Jean and Jake set to work to loose the dogs that they might tackle their banquet. Jean knew the eight of them could give a pretty good account of the remains on the skeleton.

According to custom the leader was the first dog loosed. Jan made a bee-line for the skeleton. Within a few seconds six other dogs were streaking across the intervening stretch of soft snow between the camp and the belt of timber in which the moose had fallen. But the seventh dog, Bill—though his jaws had been dripping eagerness like all the rest of them—walked slowly in the same direction as though food were a matter of indifference to him.

"What in hell's the matter with that Bill?" said Jake. "Seems like as if he's full, but he can't be."

"Beel, hee's an angry dog for sure," said Jean, with a grin.

"Looks most as if he's sick," said Jake.

"H'm! Hate-seeck, mebbe," replied Jean, as the two turned to the task of preparing their own supper.

As a fact no dog was ever more fit or more perfectly self-controlled than Bill was at that moment. In his own good time and with a most singular deliberateness, he did set his teeth in fresh moose. But he did it much as house-dogs in the world of civilization put their noses into their well-filled dinner dishes with a deliberate absence of gusto which would have simply astounded any understanding observer who could have seen it. The other seven dogs were blissfully unconscious of anything under heaven outside their own ravening lust of flesh. In a temperature well below zero, the lure of fresh-killed meat at the end of fourteen hundred miles of solid pulling, and five or six weeks of fish rations, is a force the strength of which cannot easily be conceived by livers of the sheltered life. It is the pull of an overwhelming strong passion.

And Bill, the deposed leader of the team, just nosed and tasted with the calm indifferent temperateness of an English house-dog; while every organ of his supremely healthy body ached with a veritable neuralgia of longing for red meat.

The rest of the team, including Jan, fed like wolves; indeed, some of them were literally but one or two removes from the wolf, and all of them had of late lived a life which brings any dog very close to the wolf in his

habits and instincts. It is a life which, so far as his instincts are concerned, carries a dog back and back through innumerable generations till his contact with his primeval ancestors is very close and real.

They fed like hungry wolves, and their feeding was not a pretty sight. When in his ravenous guzzling one dog's nose chanced to be thrust at all near to another's there would arise a horrid sound of half choked snarling; the fierce hissing rattle of snarls which came from flesh- and blood-glutted jaws. Obeying instincts to the full as strong as any human passion which has ever gone to the making of tragedy, these working dogs made a wild orgy of their feast. They wantoned and they wallowed in their perfectly natural gluttony. Having fed full and overfull, they desired more by reason of their long hunger for meat and the hard vigour of their lives. The last remains of flesh exhausted, they gnawed and tugged at bones, each snarling still, though half exhausted, whenever other fangs than his own touched a chosen bone.

And Bill, despite the flame of desire in his bowels, just nosed and tasted, eating no more than an ordinary work-aday ration. Long before the final stage of bone-gnawing he actually walked away and curled himself down at the roots of a big spruce where the ground rose slightly, some fifty paces distant from the place of orgy.

A couple of hundred yards away, by the shelter of their fire, Jean and Jake composed themselves to rest and smoke; for they also had fed full. One by one even the lustiest of the dogs forsook the bones, drawing back heavily, lazily licking their chops. The dense calm of

The Camp

satiety descended slowly upon all the visible life-shapes in that place like the fumes of some potent narcotic—upon all forms of life save one. Bill, curled at the root of his spruce, had within him a blazing fire of life and activity which no earthly force could slake, while his breath remained to fan it. But the rest of the world slept.

The moon that night was too young to shed much light. But just after Jean and Jake sleepily laid aside their pipes and closed their eyes, the aurora borealis flamed out icily in a clear sky, bringing more than all the light Bill needed. In that frozen stillness Bill's brain was like the interior of a lighted factory with all its machinery in full swing. Fed by hate and slowly accumulated stores of bitter anger, his thoughts went throbbing in and out the lighted convolutions of his brain with the silent positive efficiency of a gas-engine's pistons.

Bill understood everything in the world that night; in his own world; and he overlooked nothing. He would have given much, very much, to have been able to remove Jean's camp a mile or so away. The belt of open snow-space between it and him was all too narrow for his liking. Well he knew how swiftly Jean could move, how certainly he could strike when the need arose. But for this Bill had done murder that night, as surely as ever softly treading human desperado in the dead of night has done murder at a bedside. As it was he thought he must fight. Well, he was prepared. Nay, his bowels yearned for it just as strongly as any dog's bowels had yearned for fresh killed meat that night. More strongly; for in him the one yearning had mastered and ridden

down the other yearning, thus giving him his perfect preparation.

The full-fed team-dogs had been too idle that night to dig out proper sleeping nests for themselves in the snow. A mere circling whisp of head and tail and feet had served them, and the upper half of Jan's magnificent frame lay fully exposed half-way down the slope from Bill's tree. Very deliberately now Bill rose, and moved towards Jan, walking with dainty spring steps like a cat at play. In all that countryside Bill possessed an absolute monopoly of springiness and elasticity. But, at their most sluggish, dogs in the north-land are, of course, more alert than the home-staying dogs of civilization. Snip snarled fatly as Bill passed with his cat-like tread. Jan, the crimson haw of one eye gleaming as its lid lifted, growled savagely but low as Bill approached him. His big limbs twitched convulsively, and the hair about his shoulders stiffened; but so grossly full-fed was he that he did not rise, though the note of his growl ascended toward that of a snarl as Bill came nearer.

Here again, and for the hundredth time that night, Bill's icy self-control, his really marvellous command of his impulses, was sorely tried. His enemy actually was recumbent in the snow before him, while he, taut as a strung bow, was most exquisitely poised for the attack. Why fight? Why not swift delicious murder, and the gush of the loathed one's throat-blood between his fangs? Bill knew well why it must not be. But given the knowledge, how many dogs in his case, nay, how many men

similarly tempted could have forced discretion to master impulse?

Attempted murder must mean furious uproar, and uproar must mean attempted rescue; and attempted rescue, so close to camp, might well rob Bill of the life he claimed. It might leave Jan alive and himself clubbed into insensibility. In the fire-lighted brain of Bill was understanding of all things, and the determination to take no chances with regard to this the greatest killing of his life.

And so, with the most delicate care, the most minutely measured instalments of provocation, he proceeded to "crowd" the infinitely sluggish Jan. So sunk in sloth was Jan that he, who three hours earlier had been pricked to fury by an insolent glance from Bill's eyes, now positively submitted to the actual touch of Bill's nose on his hocks before he would budge. And then with a long snarl he only edged himself a yard or two away.

"Be still, be still! For God's sake give peace!" his heavy movements seemed to say.

Peace! And in Bill's lighted brain the roar of furnaces and the remorseless whirl of swiftly driven machinery!

With the fathomless scorn of the self-mastering ascetic for the sodden debauchee, Bill proceeded coldly with his task of "crowding" Jan out and away from the safety of that place and into the wilderness. In a few minutes he ventured to hasten matters by actually nipping one of Jan's hind legs with his teeth. But with what precise delicacy! It had been sweet to drive the fangs home and

feel the bone and sinew crack. But that would not mean death and might bring rescue. So Bill's jaws pressed no more hardly than those of a nursing mother of his kind, what time she draws a too venturesome pup into the shelter of her warm dugs.

It was beautifully done; a triumph of self-mastery and an exquisitely gauged piece of tactics. It brought Jan quickly lumbering to his feet, snarling savagely but not very loudly. It sent him sullenly some twenty, thirty paces nearer to his doom and further from the camp. A dozen paces Bill followed him, crowding threateningly to enforce the right direction. And then Bill halted, not wishing to risk causing Jan to dodge and double backwards towards the camp. And because his persecutor stopped when he did, Jan followed the line of least resistance, lumbering on down the slope into the deep wood, for twenty paces more before lowering himself again with a grunt for the repose which, to his glutted sloth, seemed more desirable now than all the meat in the world, aye, and of more pressing import than all his dignity, than all his new pride in working efficiency in his leadership.

With a patience no Red Indian could have excelled, Bill repeated these tactics twenty or thirty times; but always with the same nicely balanced accuracy; with ample pauses between each fresh beginning; with mathematically accurate gauging of the precise provocation needed to shift Jan farther and farther into the wilderness without seriously and dangerously arousing his somnolent faculties.

But though he himself did not know it, and Bill could

not possibly suspect it, it yet was a fact that something of wakefulness remained and grew through the intervals between Jan's forced marches. It seemed that though he did most unwillingly move on and on at Bill's cunningly given behests, Jan barely was roused from his heavy sleep into which he plunged fathoms deep every time he resumed the recumbent position. So it seemed. Thus Bill saw the outworking of his devilishly ingenious tactics. And could Jan have understood any challenge on the subject, he would have admitted that this was the way it worked.

Even Bill, with his pellucidly clear understanding of this night's happenings, did not know anything about a dog's subconscious mental processes; although it is true the subconscious self plays a greater and more obvious part in canine than in human life. Jan's outer consciousness was plagued by a series of irritating disturbances of his repose. His subconsciousness—active during Bill's carefully prolonged intermissions—was continuously disturbed, progressively roused, steadily and consistently pricked toward complete wakefulness. The statement calls for rather a lot of words, but it is worth making because of its life and death importance for Jan. He thought that only his over-fed rest was being played with; but Bill of the lighted mind and the hate-inspired ecstasy of alertness, Bill knew better.

And now, towards the end of Jan's twentieth or thirtieth move, when his subconsciousness was simply one ache of continuous boding discomfort, while still his outer consciousness barely permitted the lifting of his heavy

eye-lids; now Bill, that incarnation of calculating watchfulness, gathered up his magnificent muscles for the act which should bring the first instalment of his reward; the guerdon of his season of super-canine self-mastery. In another second or so, Jan would sink down again to sleep. Bill did not snarl or growl. He needed no trumpet call. He made no more sound than a cat makes in leaping for a bird. Yet he rushed upon the blinking, half-comatose Jan as though impelled thereto from the mouth of a spring cannon.

There was no possibility that in his then condition Jan could withstand the shock of that furious impact. And he did not. Indeed he span through the air feet uppermost, and Bill, in his eyes a cold flame of elation, knew that when he did reach earth it would be to yield the throat-hold at which your fighting dog always aims, and to die the death which he, Bill, had long pictured for the usurper of his office.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FIGHT IN THE WOODS

THE one thing for which Bill had made no allowance was the thing of which he could not possibly have any knowledge; the strength of Jan's subconscious self which had now been wide-awake for some time.

During the fraction of time which Jan's body spent in mid-air this sub-conscious self of his worked several miracles simultaneously. It jagged the whole of Jan's outer consciousness into the widest wakefulness. It explained to him the inner meaning of most things that had happened since Jean shot the moose. And acting through a muscular system which, always fine, had been made wellnigh perfect during the past six weeks, it succeeded in accomplishing the patently impossible and bringing Jan to earth again almost erect, certainly on his four feet and with spread jaws pointing toward Bill—instead of landing him on the broad of his back where Bill had quite properly and logically expected to see him.

Now began the fight between Bill and Jan, ex-leader and leader; the veteran north-land dog, comparatively empty and exquisitely poised and prepared; and the newcomer from the outside world, terribly full, heavy and

unprepared. All, or nearly all, had fallen out as Bill had planned. Their distance from the camp was a safe one; Jan was grossly bloated and he, Bill, was in quite perfect fighting trim.

Only one thing was wrong: Jan ought, by all the calculations of his enemy, to be lying feet up with his throat exposed; and instead he was standing, and as it happened, on slightly raised ground, waiting with dripping jaws for Bill's attack. Bill knew not fear. His brain was as brilliantly lighted, his furnace of hate as hot within him, as ever. But—the new-wakened Jan's snarl was certainly terrific, and his bulk, as he stood there with erect stern, bristling hackles, high-lifted lips and legs planted like buttresses—the bulk of him was immense.

"Come on!" his roaring snarl seemed to say. And fiery Bill, like a wrestler, pranced to and fro for an opening. Rage filled him to the throat; but never for an instant did it cloud his vision. Jan's instinct kept him still, warning him that he was too heavy now for the lightning footwork of the wolves; that his sole chance lay in his strength and that by the same token, his strength must be conserved.

Whoof! Tsss!

Jan's right ear hung in two separate flaps. Valiantly he strove to extort some penalty by thrust of massive shoulder and clash of fangs. But Bill to all seeming was twice his own length away in the same instant that he flashed in to the attack. Jan breathed hard in a defiant snarl.

Hup! Grrrr!

The massive shoulder which had missed its thrust was

cut clear into the bone, a groove four inches long, and in the self-same fraction of a second, the cat-like Bill, from two lengths distant, darted his red tongue in and out at Jan in cold ribaldry.

A little show of temper now on Jan's part had been a thing of priceless worth to Bill. Indeed it was the ex-leader's one desire, its provocation his sole objective for the moment. This it was that drew his pointed red tongue in and out like a flame, this the tuning-fork that gave his snarl its key; the note of insolent, jeering defiance.

"You hog! You're bloated. Ungainly beast, I can bleed you when and where I will. Take that!" snarled Bill, as he flashed in again, tearing clean away a little section of soft-coated fine skin from the left side of Jan's dewlap, where Desdemona's blood in him left him but lightly covered.

(In the bloodhound the skin is very loose and fine in texture all about the head and flews and dewlap. In Jan it hardened quickly on the neck, where the mat of his dense coat thickened.)

Again and again, not fewer than a dozen times in all, Bill drank deep of sheer delight, as he flashed in and out upon Jan, drawing blood every single time, reaching bone more than once or twice, and winning back to safety without the loss of so much as one hair.

Jan no longer snarled. He had no breath to waste. He was standing to his fearsome punishment like a bulldog now. And like a bulldog he seemed, in a heavy dogged way, and almost to glory in the bitter thrusts he took.

Then Bill overstepped himself. Striving to win a second

bite from the one rush he got the full thrust of Jan's bloody right shoulder so massily planted that he went down under it as corn under a sickle. So far so good for Jan; and by good rights that thrust should have given him his lead to victory. But the plain truth is Jan was too full of moose-meat. He plunged down and forward for the throat-hold—appreciably too late—and lost more than blood and fur from his flank as Bill wheeled into action again without any apparent loss of poise, though he had turned completely over on the snow.

Jan breathed like a bull as he resumed the defensive; and like a bull, he lowered his head with a swaying motion as though to ease his laboured breathing and drain his jaws of the spume that clogged them. He was bleeding now from more than a dozen wounds. The frost nipped those wounds stingingly. The hard trampled snow about his feet was flecked with blood and foam, his life-blood, his foam. Bill remained unscathed and to all seeming as coldly calculating as ever.

At this stage a backer of Jan (if any such reckless wight existed) might easily have booked a hundred to one against the big hound from an audience of experienced north-land men, had any been there to see this wonderful fray. It seemed a breathless business enough, with never a moment for anything like reflection. But of a truth, as Jan swung his massive head now in a gesture which added blazing coals to the fire of triumphant hate in Bill, his mind was busy with a mort of curious things.

There were many differences between Jan and the

average dog, and this illustrated one of them. As he stood heavily swaying to Bill's lightning attacks, he saw pictures in his busy mind through a mist of blood; pictures that made the whole business of this fight far more terrible for him than it would have been for most dogs.

The dominating picture Jan saw, and the one that kept forcing itself forward upon the screen of his imagination through and over all the others that came and went, was a picture of himself on his back in the trampled snow. Bill's jaws were at his throat in this picture, and his blood ebbed out, an awful tide, flooding the snow with its crimson for as far as he could see. And then the picture moved and showed him the satisfied, triumphant Bill, walking proudly away to the camp to his regained leadership; and himself, Jan, stark, helpless, dead, in that forsaken clear patch in the woods with only the cold gleam of the aurora borealis to bear him company.

Another picture showed him the stripped framework of the moose and his own reckless feasting there with the rest of the pack, while Bill, pitilessly far-seeing Bill, watched them and abstained. Jan saw it all now and gulped upon his bitterness as he realized how cunningly it had all been planned, and just why it was that, whilst his enemy seemed made of steel springs actuated by electricity, he, Jan, was heavy and clumsy as an English house-dog.

So that was the way of this bloody business, thought Jan as, swifter than a bullet, Bill registered another visit to his streaming right shoulder. There was no trace left

now of that queer stubborn sort of bulldog glory in the endurance of punishment which Jan had shown during the first half-dozen attacks. His stern was still erect, blade-like, his hackles almost as stiff as before. But the flame of his deep-hawed and now glazing eyes had died down to a dim red smoulder; his hard breathing spared nothing for a snarl now, and his head and body movements were, if anything, a little slower than before.

And in and out among the vivid pictures in his mind of immediate local happenings, came swiftly passing little silhouettes of people and happenings farther away in point of time and distance. He saw Dick Vaughan, in scarlet tunic and yellow-striped breeches, sitting on a box with his, Jan's head between his knees, his hands fondling the long ears that now were so terribly torn and bloody. He saw the great, grey, lordly Finn pacing gravely beside the Master and Betty Murdoch on the Downs at Nuthill; himself trotting to and fro between Betty and the noble hound that sired him. He heard Dick Vaughan's long throbbing whistle, and then the old familiar call—

"Jan, boy! Ja—an!"

And as he heard this call he had never once failed to answer, some subtle force at work in Jan loosed the cord that had seemed to hold him fettered to the heavy aftermath of his greed that night. His heart swelled within him in answer to the sovereign's call, till it seemed to send new blood, hot and compelling, racing through all his veins into the last least crevices of his remotest members. His massive head ceased to sway. It was uplifted in the moment that a roaring baying cry escaped him;

he knew not how or why. And that was the moment called psychological. For it was the instant of a new and different attack from Bill; this tremendous moment of Jan's real awakening.

For some minutes now, while he flashed in and out, bleeding his prey in preparation for the final assault, Bill had noted with infinite cold joy, that swaying motion of Jan's great head. He knew it well for the gesture of the baited creature, and as the head swung lower, the flames of Bill's hate shot higher and ever higher; for this lower swaying, as he knew, was the signal of the end for which he had striven so cunningly and long.

At the moment that Jan heard Dick's call, Bill drew up his muscles for administration of the final thrust. (The bull had bled sufficiently. Now for the steel in the nape.) Bill leaped, red froth flying from his bared fangs. As he leaped, Jan's strange baying roar smote upon his senses with a chill foreboding. He knew nothing of the call that had loosed from its lethargy the essential Jan. But the roar spoke of doom and Bill flinched; wavered in his attack, as a horse will momentarily waver at a high leap. That peril might have passed. But it was part of a double blunder. The leap had been wrongly conceived. It had come too soon. And now the leaper baulked, conscious of error; conscious also, dimly, of some terrific change in Jan, heralded by his awe-inspiring cry.

Bill jarred down to earth, short of his mark, his feet ill placed, his world awry. And in that instant the big hound was upon him like a bolt from heaven: the strangest attack surely that ever dog faced, or so it must have

seemed to stricken Bill, the north-land fighter for the killing throat-hold, who never had seen the famous killing grip that was always used by Jan's tall sire, Finn the wolfhound.

Jan came down upon Bill as though from the clouds. (He stood a full four inches higher than Bill.) His huge jaws, stretched to cracking point, took Bill where the base of the skull meets the spinal cord. One jaw on either side that rope of life they drove down through the matted armour of Bill's coat, through skin and flesh, and on to their ultimate destination; under the crushing pressure of a hundred and forty pounds of steel-like muscle, bone and sinew, the invincible product of the trail life developed upon a foundation of scientifically attained health and strength.

Bill, the fearless and unbeaten, now screamed aloud; not for mercy, but in mortal pain. His tense body squirmed, convulsed, under Jan's great weight, like a thing galvanized by electricity.

Jan's jaws sank deeper.

Bill snapped at the bloody snow, in his frenzy actually breaking his own fangs.

Jan's jaws sank deeper.

A long horrible shudder passed through the squirming body of Bill. And Jan's jaws sank a little deeper. Then with a dreadful sucking sound and a sharp gasp for breath, those jaws parted and were withdrawn; for Bill's long fight, and his life, were ended now; and Jan was quite alone in that desolate place.

CHAPTER XXXII

REAL LEADERSHIP

THE thrifty Jean was far from pleased when, on the morning after his lucky moose shot, he found that the sled team was short of one dog. As it happened, Jake was the first to note the absence of Bill, the ex-leader; and while he looked this way and that for the missing dog, Jean, by a thought process which went a little farther called Jan to him, and proceeded to look over the big hound.

"You don't need to look for no Beel," he said grimly, to Jake. "Look thees Jan, here. By gar, that was some fight, now I'm telling you. See that, an' thees. Look that ear. See thees shoulder. By gar, that Beel he fight good an' hard. But when he fight Jan, tha's the feenish—for Beel."

Jake and Jean together made the best job they could of patching up Jan's wounds a little against the frost, and the rub of trace and breast-band.

"Good dog, too, that blame Bill," mused Jake.

"Sure, he was good dog, very good dog; by gar, yes," agreed Jean. "But thees Jan, hee's best of all dogs. No good for Beel to fight heem. Only he was too blame full o' moose meat, he don' lose no blood to Beel, you bet.

That why Beel he don't eat las' night. Seeck? No. He too cunning, that Beel." A long pause, while Jean spat out chewed tobacco and juice over one of Jan's worst wounds, with a view to its antiseptic and healing properties. And then, on a grunting sigh: "Ah, well, I reckon that makes Jan's price five hunderd. That blame Beel, he worth two hunderd any day."

So, by Jean's simple commercial method, the big hound's wounds, and the previous night's great fight, were best summed up by reckoning that they added two hundred dollars to Jan's market price. And, all things considered, he was very likely right; for there could be no sort of doubt about it, the episode had taught Jan lessons he never would forget; it had advanced his education hugely, and added a big slice to the sum of his knowledge of the wild north-land life. Therefore it had made him the more fit to survive in the north; and hence it must have added to his value.

Dogs may not do much talking one with another, as humans understand talk; but their methods of intercourse suffice them. Just as Jean saw no need to hunt for the missing Bill, once he had looked over Jan's wounds, so every dog in the team knew perfectly well why Bill was not of their number that morning. They asked no questions; but they knew. The thing was indelibly recorded in their minds. Bill, who had mastered them, had disputed Jan's mastery. And now Bill was no more. They would not forget.

But all the same, their deductive powers were far from perfect. They saw in Jan a leader who could not hide

the soreness and stiffness caused by his many wounds. They, for their part, were feeling rather like indiscreet workmen after a public holiday that has been too recklessly enjoyed. They had no headache, but were feeling fat and lazy; and noting the stiffness of Jan's movements, they slouched and shirked, and caused delays over the making of a start that morning.

"H'm! Too much moose-meat. Thees will be a short day," growled Jean, as he reached out for his whip, before proceeding farther with the harnessing. Only the stiff-legged leader was in his place; the rest lay dotted about with lolling tongues, bent on loafing.

Jan saw Jean go for his whip. But it was no fear of the lash that moved him to action. He had been desperately conscious for a good many hours of his stiffness and weariness, and had hoped his services as policeman of the team would not have been needed that morning. Now, in a flash, he comprehended the true position. And he knew the sled was now twice its previous weight. He looked across at Jean, and gave a short, low bark, which meant—

"Don't you trouble about your whip. This is my job. Don't suppose I've forgotten it, or that this team is going to be any the weaker for Bill's loss. Devil a bit of it."

And with that, Jan tossed aside his stiffness, and flew around among his six team-mates, the very incarnation of masterful leadership. Not one dog, not even old Blackfoot, escaped him; and if their leader began the day's work as a sorely wounded dog, it was certain that each dog behind him began it with one sore spot to occupy

his mind withal. Inside of one minute he had the six of them standing alertly to attention in their respective places, waiting for their harness, and itching to be off; not by reason of any sudden access of virtue or industry in them, but because the leader they had thought too sore and stiff to accomplish much that day was pacing sternly up and down their rank, with fangs bared, and the hint of a snarl in every breath he drew; ready, and apparently rather anxious, to visit condign punishment upon the first dog who should stir one paw a single inch from its proper place.

"Five hunderd!" shouted Jean, with his broad, cheery grin. "By gar, tha' Jan hee's worth ten hunderd of any man's money for team leadin'. Yes, *sir;* an' you can say I said so. I don' care where the nex' come from; tha' Jan, hee's masterpiece."

Jake readily admitted, when, over their pipes that night, he and Jean came to review the day's run, that the team had worked better this day than on any previous day in the past month.

"With double load, an' one dog short," Jean reminded him.

"That's so," said Jake. "I guess that moose-meat's put good heart into them."

"Ah! moose-meat, hee's all right; good tack, for sure," said Jean. "But tha's not moose-meat mushed them dogs on so fast an' trim to-day. No, *sir.* Tha' Jan—bes' dog-musher in 'Merica to-day; now I'm tellin' you. He don' got Beel to upset things to-day; and, by gar, you see how he make them other dogs mush. You don't need no

Ready to start in the morning

wheep—don't need no musher, so's you got Jan a-leadin'; now I'm tellin' you."

And Jean, as his wont was in all these matters, was in the right of it. A very able and knowledgeable north-land man was Jean, and one having a rare grasp of the psychology of dog-folk. It was not alone that under Jan's no longer disputed leadership the team of seven became more efficient, faster, and better disciplined than the team of eight had been; but also it became a much happier and better team in every way. There was no longer any discontent in it. In a certain useful sense every one of the seven became a leader, though none faltered in his unhesitating deference to Jan's authority. But each and all became leaders, in so far that any one of them was prepared to resent, swiftly and tellingly, the slightest hint of a fault, a blunder, or a piece of slackness on the part of any other member of the team.

They worked harder than ever, because Jan imbued each one of them with a portion of his own inexhaustible pride in the team's perfect working. If a dog delayed the morning start, the probabilities were he would feel the nip of his next neighbour's fangs, as well as Jan's, long before the lash of a master's whip could have reached him. If one of the masters themselves delayed a start in any way, the angry restiveness of the team became most marked. Nothing—not even a master—must detract from the tale of the day's working achievement. Often Jean laughed over this.

"Look out, Jake!" he would cry, as his long-limbed partner slouched slowly forward in the morning to his

place ahead, or paused a moment, it might be, to relight his pipe. "Look out, Jake! By gar, them dogs they'll wheep you, ef you don't look slippy! See the musher there, how riled hee's gettin'."

And Jean would lean back to give his laugh vent, as with raised whip-stock he pointed to where Jan stood in the lead, pawing eagerly at the snow, his head turning swiftly from side to side as he looked round to make sure his followers were in order, and in his anxiety to catch the first breath of the command to "Mush, on there!"

And when the word came, with what a will those seven dogs bowed to their work! How furiously their hard pads scrabbled at the trail, to overcome the first inertia of the laden sled, before it gained the gliding momentum which they would never allow it to lose for an instant until the order came to halt! If any dog put one ounce less than the pressure he was capable of exerting into his breast-band, Jan knew it that instant, more surely than the watching man behind; and would let out a sharp, low-sounding bark. And very well each dog in the team knew what that bark meant. They feared it more than Jean's thong. For Jan had taught them to know that this bark gave warning of a shrewder blow to come than any whip could give; and a blow from which there would be no possible escape. Men-folk might sometimes forget a promised cuff. Jan was never known to forget a promised bite; and if twelve hours should elapse between promise and payment, so much the worse for the payee; for Jan had a system of his own for the reckoning of

compound interest, the efficacy of which, at one time or another, each dog in the team had tested, and found deadly.

Yes, in the fortnight that followed the shooting of the moose and the disappearance of Bill, the sled team driven by Jean and Jake was perhaps the finest and the most efficient in all that white world of hard-bitten, hard-trained, hard working men and dogs. And, by that token, there was no happier team living, and none in better condition. There are not many teams, of course, whose members eat moose-flesh every day. But quite part from the substantial addition to their dietary which Jean's lucky moose shot brought, his sled-team was superbly fit, and efficient, because it was perfectly led and perfectly disciplined.

And then came all the strange confusion of the noisy mining town, and the end of this particular phase of Jan's life.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE COST OF INCOMPETENCE

JAN'S private impressions of the northern mining town were, first, that it was the most horrible place he had ever seen; second, that it was perhaps the most interesting place he had ever seen; and, third and lastly, that it was a very good place to get away from, and that he would be pleased to exchange its complex interests for the clean, arduous stress and strain of the trail.

Jan spent less than a week in the town, but into that week was packed perhaps rather more than the allowance of new impressions and excitement of one sort and another that go to make up the record of her first season in town for the average human débutante. The cynic might protest that many a modern débutante is as certainly put up for sale to the highest bidder of the town season as Jan was. Well, at least the thing is a good deal more carefully wrapped up and veiled, and a great deal more time is given to it.

Jean was very firmly set in his determination not to part with Jan for a cent under five hundred dollars. (Had not Jan cost him two hundred dollars on the night of Bill's disappearance?) Had there been any really knowledgeable judges of dogs in the town just then who needed

a dog, they would hardly have quarrelled with his owner over Jan's price. But it happened there were none. And the result was that Jan had to be put through his paces five separate times for the benefit of five separate prospective purchasers, not one of whom was really capable of appreciating his superlative quality, before the five hundred dollars demanded did eventually find its way into Jean's pouch, and he was called upon to part with his leader. He intended to give Snip the leadership of his team now, because Snip was a curiously remorseless creature; and to buy a husky as cheaply as might be to take the trace ahead of Blackfoot—kindliest of wheelers.

Jean's parting with Jan was characteristic of the man. He had conceived an admiring and prideful affection for the big hound, and had liefer died than allow this to be shown to any other man. His pride in his dog's ability, his full appreciation of the animal's many points—yes, he would show these, and very insistently, to any man. But for his perfectly genuine affection; that, as he understood it, was a culpable weakness which no living soul must be permitted to suspect—no not even Jan himself. And that was where Jean fooled himself. For his occasional blows and frequent curses did not in the least deceive Jan, who was perfectly well aware of Jean's fondness for him, and, to a considerable extent, reciprocated the feeling. He did not love Jean; but he liked the man, and trusted and respected him for his all-round ability and competence.

"Ye—es," said Jean slowly to the moneyed *chechaquo*

who had purchased Jan, "tha' Jan, hee's ther bes' lead dog ever I see, an' I've handled some. But ef you take my word, Mister Beeching, you won' ask Jan to take no other place than lead in your team. Eef you do, your leader 'll hear about it, en he might lose some hide over it, too, I guess. But tha' Jan, hee's a great lead dog, all right, an' I'm tellin' you. Well, so long, boss; I'll be gettin' along. Git back there, you, Jan! By gar, you stay right there now, when I say so. What 'n hell d'you want follerin' me? Git back!"

That was how Jean bade Jan good-bye. Jan, scenting trouble vaguely, was determined to stick to Jean, and thought he went about it craftily enough. But Jean caught him each time, and kicked him back to the place where the *chechaquo* stood, cuffing him roughly over the head by way of final salutation.

"I'll larn ye to foller me," he said sourly.

"Mighty little *he* cares for his dogs!" thought the tenderfoot; and he turned (with his more delicate sentiments) to caress Jan's head. But Jan abruptly lowered his head to avoid the touch; though, obedient now to Jean, the proved master, he remained where he had been told to stay.

But these things happened within twenty-four hours of Jan's departure from that town. In the days immediately preceding this one of his parting from Jean he had roamed the town at large with Blackfoot, Snip, and the others of his team, observing, making acquaintances, fending off attacks, administering punishment, and swaggering with the best among a great company of sled

dogs of all sorts and sizes, and in every varying grade of condition, from fatted and vainglorious sleekness to downright emaciation. For there were dogs here who, having recently shared cruelly hard times with their men, would require weeks of recuperation to make them fit for the rigours of the trail. Some of this latter sort were for sale, and could be bought for a tenth of Jan's price, or less. Others, again, were "resting," as the actors say, while their impoverished masters worked at some other craft to earn money enough to give them back the freedom of the trail.

There were some rare swaggerers, some redoubtable toughs, and some famous fighters among the dogs that Jan and his friends brushed shoulders with in the streets of this crude capital of gold and snow, squalor and extravagance. But among them all was no finer team than Jan's, nor any that could challenge successfully so compact and steady a little company as theirs. Once and again some swaggering ruffler would pin the too credulous and amiable old Blackfoot in a corner by himself, with a view to giving him a fall. But so surely as Blackfoot raised his voice—as he never failed to do upon the smallest provocation—Jan and Snip and the others would come flashing down to his rescue, and his assailant would have to slink out of that incident with torn ears and blooded flanks, a meeker, if not a wiser, dog than he had ever thought to be before his attack upon Blackfoot.

As for Jan, within twenty-four hours he was free to parade that town entirely alone should he so choose, and

few and rare were the huskies who would not instantly give trail at sight of his massive front and erect, scimitar-like stern. Jan did not ask them to give trail. He sought no obsequiousness, and showed himself in no sense a bully. But he insisted on civility, and the dog that snarled at him, or sought to "crowd" him as he walked, must of a surety reckon with Jan's fangs. No kind of bluff would serve him to evade that reckoning.

For Jan, with his marvellous bloodhound powers of scenting, the conflicting smells of this town were not less than distracting, after the clean simplicity of the open trail. He was for ever being brought up all standing, in his walks abroad, by a sudden recognition of the trail of Jean, or Jake, or of one of his own team-mates; a trail made, perhaps, twenty-four hours ago, and complicated since by the admixture of a hundred other trails. These things, like the innumerable meetings with other dogs, undoubtedly made for interest, and very often for excitement. But, upon the whole, the life of the town struck Jan as being too confused, vague, and devoid of plan to be really a good life.

None the less, he felt tolerably forlorn and desolate when, upon his last evening there, he was led away by his new master, whose name, it seemed, was Beeching, and locked in a small enclosure of high iron rails with nine other dogs, the remaining complement of the team in which he was now to serve. However, for a while he was kept too busy here to spare much thought for the matter of the loss of his companions.

Every one of the nine strangers was sleek and well

fed. *Chechaquo* Beeching was bound for the sea and civilization, with the moderate pile which a beginner's luck, rather than any skill or enterprise of his, had brought him; and he was bent on doing the trip in style, he and his curious friend, whom he called Harry. Of these nine finely conditioned dogs, four had met Jan about the town, and learned to show him some deference. Two—Jinny and Poll—were bitches, and therefore not to be regarded by Jan as possible opponents in a fight; but the remaining three members of the crowd, lusty huskies, full of meat and insolence, had never seen the big hound before, and these had to be thrashed pretty soundly before Jan won his footing in the enclosure.

Fortunately, the two bitches were disposed to be friendly from the outset, and of the three huskies, two were intently engaged upon bones at the time of Jan's entrance. The third husky attacked him blindly, without stopping to exchange so much as glances. This little incident was soon ended. In ten seconds Jan had bowled clean over on his back the too temerarious Gutty—to give this particular husky the name under which Mr. Beeching had bought him—and was shaking him by the throat as a terrier shakes a rat. But Jan was far from being really angry, or Gutty had paid with his life for the impudence of his attack; and when the husky chokingly whined for mercy, he was allowed to spring to his feet and slink away into a dark corner, with nothing worse than a little skin-wound to worry over.

The case of the other two huskies was more serious, however; for in the half light Jan chanced to brush

against one of them, as he gnawed his bone; and in the next moment they both were leaping at him with clashing fangs, convinced that he aimed at plunder. While Jan, in warding off their attacks, tried to explain good-humouredly that he meant them no ill, Jinny and Poll made off with their bones. But of this the two huskies knew nothing, being fully occupied by their joint attack upon the great dog, who, had they but known it, was destined for some time to be their master, in the traces and out of them.

It was a rather troublesome fight, involving considerable bloodshed; for Fish and Pad, the two huskies, were quite notable battlers, and Jan, for his part, was genuinely anxious to avoid any killing. He was quite shrewd enough to know that he had now joined a new team, and, while it was very necessary that his prowess should be recognized and respected, he desired peace, and perfectly understood that, if he began by killing, the results might be serious for the team and for himself.

In the end, having made some sacrifices, he had to inflict a severe gash on the side of Pad's face, and to come near to throttling the life out of Fish, before he could reduce the pair of them to a state of comparatively decent, if still snarling, submission. After that there was peace; Fish and Pad were too busy in dressing their wounds to notice the loss of their bones; and Jan was free to introduce himself to the others of the pack, which he did in friendly fashion enough, despite his still raised hackles and rather noticeably stiff gait.

There was quite a gathering assembled next morning

to see the last of Jan's new masters. But though he eyed the crowd closely to find them, Jan saw nothing of Jake or Jean, nor any of his old team-mates. Beeching and Harry—the latter a gentleman who, having apparently no faith in his own luck, believed in attaching himself firmly to any more fortunate person who would tolerate his society—were, to all seeming, not really unpopular. The thoroughly unpopular man is rarely guyed, with roars of open laughter and back-slapping merriment, by men who wink and nod at one another, while joining forces in the matter of ragging their butt.

That was how Beeching was treated by the crowd of acquaintances who came to give him his start on the southward, seaward trail. Harry was, for the most part, merely ignored. It was understood that now, as in the past, he was supposed to make himself "useful" by way of paying his shot; and as he had never been known to be any other thing than useless, it was evidence rather of the easy good-nature than the perspicacity of his associates, that he never had actually lacked food and shelter in that place. But that was as much, men thought, as "Tame Cat Harry" could possibly expect. One of the last fond messages flung at Beeching, as his overloaded sled swung out on the trail, was—

"Don't you be letting Harry loose, mind you, or he'll surely hark back on the trail; an' then we'll shoot him on sight."

"Well, say," yelled another man, "if you do loose him any, be sure you put a muzzle on him, so's to keep our grub-boxes safe."

After which crude jibe at Harry's sponging proclivities, Homeric laughter set a period upon the town's farewell to Jan's new masters. And that laughter stirred to fresh activity the uneasy want of confidence, the rather cheerless sense of foreboding which, for close upon twenty-four hours now, had been growing in the breast of the team's leader. Jan should, perhaps, have felt drawn toward Beeching and Harry, since both were compatriots of his, and hailed from southern England. But England has sent a good many of her most confirmed wastrels oversea, along with the very cream of her manhood; and whether or no, Jan had no more confidence in his masters than he had in Gutty, the husky he had thrashed over night, and far less than he had in Fish and Pad, the two opponents he had found so much more difficult to trounce.

As a fact, Jan's scepticism was amply justified. In the thirty-five day trip thus begun—which should have been completed in sixteen days—Jan was given as striking an example of the effects of man's muddle-headed, slack-minded incompetence as that which Jean had furnished him of the effects of man's able-bodied, clear-headed competence and efficiency. Jan never worked it out in precisely this way, but after his own simple and direct fashion he came to the definite conclusion, before he had been two days on the trail with Beeching and Harry, that, for his part, he would sooner thole the harshest kind of severity or even cruelty in a master, so that it be allied with competence, than he would endure those evils which (in the north-land more than in most places)

attend all the steps of the man who is slack, shiftless and incompetent; and, be it noted, make miserable the days of all and sundry who are forced to be in any way dependent on that man.

It was with much wistful regret that Jan recalled in these days the daily round of his life, after the fight with Bill, as Jean's lead dog. The swift, positive, and ordered evolutions of those smoothly running days seemed merely miraculous in retrospect, as Jan compared his memory of them with the wretched muddle of Beeching's wasteful scramble across the country. They carried no trade goods, nothing save the necessary dog-food and creature comforts for the two men; yet their sled—an extra large one—was half as heavy again to pull as Jean's had been, despite the ten primely conditioned dogs who made up Beeching's "flash" team.

The morning was generally far advanced when Beeching and Harry started in to clear the muddle of their amateurish night's camp, with all its preposterous litter of bedding, utensils (always unclean) and other wasteful truck such as no men can afford to carry in the northland. But the day would be half done by the time their muddled preparations were finally completed.

And then, more often than not, one of the men would add his own not inconsiderable weight to that of the half-packed, overladen sled; and, at the best, Harry as a trail-breaker and finder was of no more use than a blind kitten would have been. A dozen times in the day a halt would be called for some enforced re-packing of the jerry-built load on the sled; and at such times some

unpacking would often have to be done, to provide liquor or other refreshment for the men. There were times when, on a perfect trail, the day's run would be no more than twenty miles; and there were days of bad trail, when even Jean would have been put to it to make more than five and twenty miles, and these incompetents, with their ten-dog team, covered a bare eight or ten miles.

Pride in his leadership was as impossible for Jan in these conditions as was content or pride in his share of the work for any other member of the team. But that was not the worst of it. During the first day or two of the trip Jan was staggered to find that these new masters of his had no notion of measuring dog rations, or even of serving these with any sort of regularity as to time, or portions, or gross quantity. They would feed some or all the dogs, at any time of day at all, and in any feckless way that came handy. At their first and second midday halts, for instance, they flung down to the team, as though to a herd of sheep or swine, food enough for three days' rations, their own leavings and the orthodox dog ration stuff, in a mixed heap.

Given decent, proper feeding, Jan would have seen to it that order was preserved, and no thieving done. Each dog should have had his own "whack," and none have been molested. But with all his genuine love of order and discipline, Jan was no magician. He could not possibly apportion out a scattered refuse heap. He had necessarily to grab a share for himself; and, as was inevitable, the weaker members of the team went short, or got nothing.

Then—unheard-of profligacy—came another equally casual distribution at night; and yet another, it might be, in the morning—in the morning, with the trail before them!

It resolved itself into this: there were no dog meals on that journey; but only daily dog-fights, snarling, scrapping, blood- and hatred-letting scrimmages for grub; disgraceful episodes, in themselves sufficient to shut out any hope of discipline in the team.

The quite inevitable shock came on the evening of the twelfth day. (With his costly team, Beeching had gaily figured on fifteen days for the entire trip, in place of the thirty-five days which it actually occupied.) The only good thing that memorable twelfth day brought was the end of Beeching's whisky supply. Incidentally it marked, too, the end of his easy-going good temper. And to the consternation of an already thoroughly demoralized team, it brought also the serving out, in a heap as before—this cruel and messy trick, more perhaps than any other one thing, marked the men's wretched slackness and incompetence; qualities generally more cruel in their effects than any harshness or overseverity—of fish representing in the aggregate rather less than half a day's ration for each dog in the team.

The next day, and the next, and the next, brought a similar dispensation to the dogs; no more. By this time the nightly feeding had become a horrid and bloody battle.

"Nasty savage brutes!" said sponging Harry.

"Blood does tell," observed the oracular Beeching, him-

self by repute a man of family. "They're every one of 'em mongrels."

The son of lordly Finn and queenly Desdemona attached no meaning to these words, of course; but were it not for the discipline, the generations of discipline in his blood, he could have strangled these two muddlers for the tragic folly of their incompetence, the gross exhibition of their slackness.

As the men themselves began to feel the belly-pinch, they brought up no reserves of manhood, but, on the contrary, they took to cruelly beating their now weakened team, when the dogs were safely tethered in the traces, and to cowardly avoidance of the poor brutes at all other times. Harry was quite unashamedly afraid to throw the dogs their beggarly half or quarter ration; and but for Beeching, it may be the dogs had starved while food still remained on the sled.

Maybe the fact that Beeching, with all his faults, had never reached Harry's depths as a sponger, preserved him from this particular crime. But he had small ground in that for self-gratulation, since it is a fact remembered in the country that when he did eventually stagger down to salt water with his sadly reduced team, the dogs had positively not had their harness off for a week. Mr. Beeching and his precious partner had been afraid to let their dogs out of the traces and the safe reach of their whips!

The fatally unwise Gutty was the first to succumb. Fish downed him for a morsel of food he had grabbed; and when the team had been over the spot on which he fell, there simply was no Gutty left. Poll, the slighter

of the two bitches, died under Harry's whip—the haft of it—or she, like Jinny, would have seen salt water, because their sex was their protection—from their fellow dogs, though not from the now starving and insensate clowns who drove them.

Everything but the scant remains of the men's food had, of course, been jettisoned before this. The dogs made a meal of the smart waterproof sheets, and Jan ate Beeching's show pair of moccasins. The whole business forms a wretched and shameful record that need not be prolonged.

To be quite just, one should mention that Beeching was afoot (hammering Jan's protruding haunches) when they staggered into the township on the evening of the thirty-fifth day. Harry lay groaning on the sled, and had been there, too lame to walk, he said, too despicable, perhaps, for Death's consideration, for three days and more. The ten-dog team of prime-conditioned animals of five weeks before consisted now of seven gaunt, staggering creatures, each a bony framework, masked in dried blood and bruises; each suffering jarring agony from every tremulous step taken, and all together (as the market went) worth, it might be—to a very speculative dog-doctor—say, ten dollars. The team had cost the deplorable Beeching about three thousand.

But, as a matter of fact, Pad died in the moment of stoppage, and two of his mates got their release while yet in the traces. Jan, Jinny, and two others survived still at the bitter end of what was, perhaps, the most wretchedly bungled trip ever made over that famous trail.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JAN OBEYS ORDERS AT THE GREAT DIVIDE

EXPERIENCED observers contended that the most truly remarkable thing about *Chechaquo* Beeching was not, after all, his super-slackness or his criminal stupidity, but his invincible luck.

Where many good men and true, infinitely capable and knowledgeable, had starved, or failed to make a scavenger's wage, Beeching had tumbled into possession of a couple of hundred thousand dollars, and, after having sampled most methods of "burning" money known to the north-land, still had fully half this sum to his credit.

That was one astounding proof of his tenderfoot's luck. But more remarkable evidence of it was found, by those who understood, in his memorable journey to salt water.

By all the rules of the game, men said, Beeching and his hanger-on should have been starved, frozen, and eaten by their outraged dogs a week or more before the end of their trip. And failing that, some old-timers pointed out, they should have been publicly lynched on arrival at salt water.

Instead, they fell into the hands of roughly good-

natured men, who not only gave them food and drink, and helped them down to the wharf, but actually set them up with a travelling kit of new clothing.

Then, again, consider the really astounding fact that a steamer should have been waiting to cast off at the moment these two men arrived, and that her skipper held his ship up for half-an-hour to suit the convenience of the precious pair, and finally carried them on in his two best cabins!

"But what about the sled and the team?" whined Harry, as he and Beeching hobbled up the gangway of the waiting steamer, bound for luxury and civilization. It may be Harry had thought of these as one of his hard-earned perquisites.

"Oh, to blazes with the sled and dogs!" cried *Chechaquo* Beeching. "The town's welcome to 'em, for all I care."

Generous man! And at that precise moment, his tough life starved and hammered out of his hardy body, the exhausted Fish was breathing his last—still in the traces; and Jan, in whom the fires of life, though better laid than those of ninety-nine dogs in a hundred, were burning very low just now—barely flickering, indeed—was concentrating such energies as remained in him upon gnawing feebly at his traces, for the double purpose of extracting some nutriment from them, if that might be, and freeing himself from their control.

The first of these aims was a tolerably hopeless one, since Jan could not just now swallow any hard thing. But in the second he achieved success, just as the steamer's gangway was hauled up, and the population

of the town was engaged in waving farewell to the craft that connected them with the big outside world, where sentimentality and dollars rule just as in the north-land muscle, grit, endurance—and dollars rule. Yes, even there, money does play one of the chief ruling parts. But, as a general thing, sentimentality does not.

The remaining wrecks of the team, two dead, one dying, and three too far gone in the same direction to be capable of any effort, lay where they had fallen, at the moment when willing hands had come to help their masters to the steamer.

It may be that Jan had bigger physical reserves to draw upon than his mates had. It is more likely, however, that the powers which kept him striving still to live, after the others had given up effort, were factors on the mental side of his composition. His memories were stronger and more vivid, his imagination a thing far more complex than that of any husky. Also his faith in men, and his desire for their help and companionship—even after five weeks with Beeching and Harry—was greatly stronger than the same factors were in any of his team mates. The culminative influences of hundreds of generations of civilization spoke in him here.

And so, trailing beside him the gnawed-off ends of his traces, Jan dragged his emaciated frame along in jerks over the hard-trodden snow, while the folk of the town cheered the departing steamer. In a little while Jan came to a small tent, the flap of which hung loose and open. At the entrance Jan smelt the fresh trail of a man; from within came—to nostrils cunning as Jan's—the odour of

foodstuffs. Jan propped and jerked himself feebly into the tent, though for months now he had known that it was forbidden to enter the habitations of men-folk.

Nosing weakly to and fro, Jan found on a low shelf a can of milk. A half-blind jab of his muzzle brought it tumbling to the ground. Its lid was open, but the milk was firmly frozen. Jan licked at it, cutting his deep flews as he did so on the uneven edges of the tin. The warmth of his tongue extracted a certain sweet milkiness from this. But the metal edges were raw and sharp; Jan's exhaustion was very great, and presently he sank down upon the twig-strewn ground, and lay there, breathing in weak, sobbingly uncertain gasps, the milk-can between his outstretched paws.

Jan was now drawing very near, nearer than he had ever been before, to the great Divide.

Within a hundred yards of Jan were groups of solid frame houses, with warm kitchens in them, and abundant food. But the tent, standing by itself, came first; and, though he could not know it, the tent was, on the whole, the very best of all the habitations in that bleak little town—for Jan. For this tent was the temporary home of an American named Willis—James Gurney Willis; as knowledgeable a man as Jean himself, and, in addition, one known wherever he went in the north-land as a white man.

Not many minutes after Jan's lying down there, Jim Willis came striding up to his tent from the wharf, and found the half of its floor space occupied by the gaunt wreck of the biggest hound he had ever seen. Willis was

a man of experience in other places than the north-land, and he would always have known a bloodhound when he saw one. But never had he seen a hound of any kind with such a frame as that he saw before him now. The dead, blood-matted black and iron-grey coat was no bloodhound's coat, he thought; too long and wiry and dense for that. But yet the head—— And anyway, thought Willis, how came the poor beast to have died just there, in his tent?

And in that moment the heavy lids of Jan's eyes twitched and lifted a little. It was rather ghastly. They showed no eyes, properly speaking. The eyes seemed to have receded, turned over, disappeared in some way. All that the lifted lids showed Willis was two deep, triangular patches of blood-red membrane. And above the prominent, thatched brows rose the noble bloodhound forehead, serried wrinkle over wrinkle to the lofty peak of the skull.

"My God!" muttered Willis, with no irreverent intent.

Always rich in the bloodhound characteristic of abundant folds of loose, rolling skin about the head, neck, and shoulders, the wreck of Jan, from which so very many pounds of solid flesh had been lost during the past month, seemed to carry the skin of two hounds. And set deep in these pouched and pendant folds of skin—tattered, bloodstained banners of the hound's past glories—the face of Jan was as a wedge, incredibly long and narrow.

His eyes had been torn out, it seemed. That was what forced the exclamation from Willis. But it was only an abnormal extension of the blood-red haws that Willis

"The gaunt wreck of the biggest hound he had ever seen"

saw. The eyeballs had rolled up and back somewhat, as they mostly do when a hound is *in extremis;* but they would have shown if Jan had had the strength properly to lift his lids. Yet he had seen Willis. It was his utter weakness, combined with the hanging weight of his wrinkled face and flew skin, that caused the ghastly show of blood-red membrane only where eyeballs should have been.

But Jan did see Willis, and the loose skin of his battered shoulders even shrank a little, in anticipation of a blow. Jan thought himself still in the traces. (As a fact he was; and breast-band, too.)

The moment Willis spoke—his low "My God!"—Jan fancied he had heard the old order to "Mush on!" and doubtless that another blow from the haft of Beeching's whip was due. In view of his then desperate state, the effort with which Jan answered the command he fancied he heard was a positive miracle. He actually staggered to his feet, though too weak to lift his eyelids, and plunged forward, with weakly scrabbling paws, to throw his weight upon the traces. And plunging against nothing but space, he had surely crashed to earth again, and in that moment crossed the Divide, but for Willis.

Willis was not of the type of men who waste breath over repetitions of exclamation of surprise. As Jan slowly heaved up his body, in a last effort at duty, Willis swiftly lowered his own body, dropping upon his knees, both arms widely extended. And it was at Willis's broad chest, and between his strongly supporting arms that the wreck of Jan plunged, in response to what must be reckoned

by far the greatest effort, till then, that the big hound had ever made.

And if the thing had ended there, this incident alone proved that when he chose the tent, before any of the more ambitious habitations near by, Jan had chosen what was assuredly the best place for him in all that town.

CHAPTER XXXV

BACK TO THE TRAIL

LATE that same evening two men who looked in to see Jim Willis, found him playing sick-nurse to all that remained of the strangest looking hound ever seen in those parts. His stove was well alight, and near-by, on the bed, were a spoon, a flask of whisky, a dish of hot milk, and some meat-juice in a jar.

There was some talk about the hound, and then the bigger of the visitors said—

"Well, Jim, what's it to be? Will you tackle the job, or won't you? You must admit, if the trail *is* bad, the money's pretty good. Will you go?"

Willis nodded shortly. That meant acquiescence in the statement that the money was "good." Then he pointed to the hound, whose head rested on his knee. (He himself was sitting on the ground.)

"Well, no, Mike; I guess I won't," he said slowly. "You say I'd have to hit out to-morrow; and I reckon I'm going to try an' hike this feller back into the world before I go anywheres."

"But, hell, Jim," said the other man, a little petulantly. "I like a dawg as well as the next man, and this one does

seem to have been some husky in his time. Only—well, you admit yourself the money's good, and—say, I won't try any bluffs with you. There ain't another man in the place we could trust to do the job. Come, now, is it a go, Jim?"

Willis pondered a minute, eyeing Jan's head the while.

"Well, Mike," he said at length, "I've kinder given my word to this feller here. He's a sort of a guest o' mine, in a way—in my tent, and that. No, Mick, I'll not hit out to-morrow, not for any money. But if you'd care to leave it for a week or ten days—ten days, say, I'll go. An' that's the best I can do for you. Think it over, an' let me know to-morrow."

And with that the two men had to content themselves. They went out growling. Three minutes later the shorter of the two returned.

"Say, Jim," he remarked, as he thrust his head and shoulders in at the tent flap, "I've been puzzling my head about that blame crittur ever since we first come in; an' now I've located him. He's dyin' a long way from home, Jim, is that dawg. But I can give ye his name. He's Jan, that's who he is. There! See his eyes move then, when I said 'Jan.' Look! Jan! See that?"

Jim Willis nodded comprehendingly as he watched Jan's feebly flickering eyelids.

"Yes, sir," continued the other man; "I've seen a picture of him in the Vancouver *News-Advertiser*. He's Jan of the R.N.W.M.P., that's who he is; 'the Mounted Police bloodhound,' they called him. He tracked a murderer down one time, somewhere out Regina way;

though how in the nation he ever made this burg has me fairly beat. Where 'n the world did that blame *chechaquo* raise him, d'ye suppose? Surely he'd never have sand enough to go around dog-stealing, would he? An' from the North-west Mounted! Not on your life he wouldn't. Sneakin' coppers out 've a blin' man's bowl 'ld be more in his line o' country, I reckon. But that's Jan, all right; an' you can take it from me. Queer world, ain't it? Well, so long, Jim. I jest thought I'd look back an' tell ye. So long!"

"So long, Jock. Oh, say, Jock! What's happened the rest o' that—that feller's team, anyway?" asked Willis.

"Well, Seattle Charley told me they was plum petered out. Most of 'em's died, I believe. But two or three's alive. That Indian musher across the creek's got 'em, doctoring of 'em up, Charley says. He reckons to pull some round, an' make a bit on 'em, I suppose. But this feller here, he's too far gone, Jim. You can see he's done."

"Ah! Well, good-night, Jock."

"S'long!"

And with that, Jim Willis was left alone again with the hound he was nursing.

He folded a deerskin coat loosely, and placed it under Jan's head. Then he reached for his spoon, and proceeded to force down a little more warm whisky-and-milk beside the clenched jaws. One knew, by the way he lifted one of Jan's flews, raised the dog's head, and gently rubbed his gullet between thumb and forefinger to help the liquor down, that he had handled sick dogs before to-day. He had covered Jan's body with an old buffalo robe, and

now he proceeded to fill a jar with boiling water, and placed that against Jan's chest.

There could be no doubt but what Jan chose more wisely than he knew in entering that tent.

. . . . . .

On the morning of the ninth day—Jim Willis's word was a little better than the bonds of some men—after the departure for the south of Beeching and Harry, Willis hit the trail upon the commission he had undertaken for Mike and Jock; or for the more richly monied powers behind those two.

Willis's team consisted of five huskies, good workers all; and he travelled pretty light, with a sled packed and lashed as only an old hand at the trail can perform that task. But the queer thing about the outfit was that Willis had a sixth dog with him, a dog half as large again as any in the traces; and this one walked at Jim's heel, idle; though, at the outset, it had taken some sharp talk to get him there. Indeed, the big dog had almost fought for a place at the head of the team of huskies. But Jim Willis was accustomed to see to it that his will, not theirs, ruled all the dogs he handled; and as he had decided that this particular dog should, for the present, run loose at his heels, the thing fell out thus, and not otherwise.

In nine days Jan had made a really wonderful recovery. He was not strong and hard yet, of course; but, as every one who had observed his case admitted, it was something of a miracle that he should be alive at all. And

here he was setting out upon a fourteen hundred mile journey, and, to begin with, fighting for a place in the traces.

"If I have any more of your back talk, my gentleman," Jim Willis had said, with gruff apparent sternness, "I'll truss you like a Thanksgiving turkey, an' lash you atop the sled. So you get to heel, an' stay there. D'ye hear me?"

And Jan, not without a hint of convalescent peevishness, had heard, and dropped behind.

The bones of his big frame were still a deal too prominent, and he carried more than even the bloodhound's proper share of loose, rolling skin. But his fine black and iron-grey coat had regained its gleaming vitality; his tread, if still a little uncertain, was springy; his dark, hazel eyes showed bright and full of spirit above their crimson haws; his stern was carried more than half erect, and he was gaining weight in almost every hour; not mere fatty substance—Willis saw to that—but the genuine weight that comes with swelling muscles and the formation of healthy flesh.

"There's nothing like the trail for a pick-me-up," said Jim Willis. And as the days slipped past, and the miles of silent whiteness were flung behind his sled, it became apparent that he was in the right of it, so far, at all events, as Jan was concerned.

It was exactly forty-two days later that they sighted salt water again, and were met in the town's one street by Mike and Jock. And on that day, as on each of twenty preceding days, Willis's team consisted of six dogs, in-

stead of five and the leader of the team was half as big again as his mates. It was noticed that Willis's whip was carried jammed in the lower lashing of his sled pack, instead of in his hand. He had learned as much, and more, than Jean had ever known about Jan's powers as a team-leader.

"No use for a whip with that chap in the lead," he told an inquirer. "If you hit Jan, I reckon he'd bust the traces; and he don't give you a chance to find fault with the huskies. I reckon he'd eat 'em before he'd let 'em really need a whip. I haven't carried mine these three weeks now."

"You don't say," commented a bystander. Jim nodded to show he did "say."

"I tell ye, that dog he don't just do what you tell him; he finds out what you want before you know it, and blame well does it before you can open your mouth. An' he makes the huskies do it, too, on schedule, I can tell you, or he'll know the reason why. Yes, sir. I take no credit for his training. I guess he was kinder born to the job, an' knows it better'n what I do. I don't know who did train him, if anybody ever did; but as a leadin' sled-dog he's got all the Yukon whipped to a standstill. He's the limit. Now you watch!"

Of set purpose, Willis spoke with elaborate carelessness.

"Just mush on a yard or two, not far, Jan."

His tone was conversational. Jan gave a short, low bark; and in the same moment the five huskies flung themselves into their collars behind him. The sled—its

runners already tight frozen—creaked, jerked, and slid forward just eight feet. Jan let out a low, warning growl. The team stood still without a word from its owner.

"Say, does he talk?" asked a bystander. And then, with a chuckle: "Use a knife an' fork to his grub, Jim?"

"Oh, as to that," said Willis, "he don't need to do no talkin'. He can make any husky understand without talk; an' when that husky understands, if he won't do as Jan says, Jan'll smother him, quick an' lively."

As Jan stood now at the head of his team, awaiting final orders, he formed a picture of perfect canine health and fitness. He represented most of a north-lander's ideals and dreams of what a sled-dog should be, plus certain other qualities that came to him from his breeding, and that no dog-musher would have even hoped for in a sled-dog: his immense size, for example, and his wonderful dignity and grace of form and action.

Jan never had been so superlatively fit; so instinct in every least hair of his coat, in every littlest vein of his body, with tingling life and pulsing energy. His coat crackled, if a man's hand was passed along his black saddle.

Despite the lissom grace of all his motions, Jan moved every limb with a kind of exuberant snap, as though his strength spilled over from its superabundance, and had to be expended at every opportunity to avoid surcharge. His movements formed his safety-valve, you fancied. Robbed of these, his abounding vitality would surely burst through the cage of his great body in some way, and destroy him. He walked as though the forces of grav-

itation were but barely sufficient to tether him down to mother earth.

"And I reckon he weighs near a hundred and sixty," said Willis; a guess the store scales proved good that night, when Jan registered exactly 157 pounds, though he carried no fat, nor an ounce of any kind of waste material.

Every one in those parts knew Jim Willis for a knowledgeable man, and one who never chose, or needed to be idle. Men, including officials, went to him without qualms or hesitancy when a difficult job of any kind was toward. And the thing that made him the antithesis of Jan's first north-land master, Jean, was that nobody who knew the man ever thought of asking Jim Willis to do anything that was in the least crooked or questionable. He earned good money, because he could safely be trusted with any quantity of other folks' money; and he would touch none, on his own account or any other man's, that was not clean money. Withal, you would not find a shrewder man in a day's march, and he was quite ready to nod his acquiescence when some one said in the store that night—

"Well, I reckon Jim warn't altogether a-wastin' time then, when he sot down to nuss that dawg."

"You bet," remarked a well-known dog-musher, who had just offered four hundred dollars for Jan—a longish price beside salt water—and been smilingly told to go elsewhere with his dollars.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CAMP-FIRE PICTURES

THE greater part of the summer and fall of that year was spent by Jan and Willis clear outside the borders of the Yukon and Alaska, in the remoter portions of the Mackenzie country.

It seemed the sort of errands upon which Jim Willis was employed generally took him over the less frequented trails of the great lone land, and often enough, led him through country in which there were no trails at all save those made by Nature herself in her water-courses, and by her own folk: the creatures of the wild.

In these days Jan learned a great deal of the wild folk, and became perfectly familiar with the tracks and habits of moose and wolves and lynx, besides the lesser fry: the porcupines, chipmunks, squirrels, and different breeds of north-land rabbits.

The real summer months saw Willis's sled team laid off in an old Hudson Bay fort on the Mackenzie River. But Jan, the leader, accompanied him upon all his lonely wanderings, and came to know the man well, to respect him greatly, and to like him much. Beyond that, their intimacy did not go; for Jim Willis had his definite limitations.

A just, good man was Willis, true and straight, fear-

less, and scrupulously honest. More than this he was a kindly man, and one who controlled himself finely. Jan never saw him show temper or cruelty to man or beast. The doctoring instinct was strong in him. He would cheerfully spend an hour over cleaning, probing, and dressing a dog's wounded foot for example; and that with no more selfish thought than the desire to free the animal from pain; to make it whole and well.

Withal, strange as it would seem to the denizens of softer climes, in all the many days and nights of their fellowship, Jan never once felt the touch of this strong man's hand in a caress. Never once did Willis stroke Jan's head, or rub his ears. In an earlier stage of his life, Jan would have been very ready to ask for such demonstrations from anyone who had given him close companionship and uniform kindness. And if he had done this now—who knows? He might have tapped some latent spring of tenderness in Willis's nature, and brought new forces into play in this man's life.

But since the first day of his introduction to the working north-land life, Jan never had in any single way sought the caresses nor even the touch of man. He had sought only to do his duty, to keep his end up, as the saying is, to be watchful, to guard well and to strike hard and swiftly where striking was to be done; to avoid the anger of men, and to enforce upon beasts recognition of his own superior powers.

This was an outward sign of the inward and spiritual development wrought in Jan by the life of the north-land.

With all this, Jan had by no means lost his capacity for affection, for devotion, or for gratitude. But he had adapted himself to the cold, stern whiteness of his environment. It had become quite foreign to his nature to make advances other than the hostile sort. But he could have responded to advances. He was swift and remorseless in attack; instant and deadly in defence. He was more alertly responsive to every kind of impression than ever in his life before. But to make advances in demonstration of affection; that was something which no more occurred to him in these days, than the notion of allowing men or dogs to step across his body while he lay on the ground, or of rolling on his back in playful abandon before another dog. There was that in his blood now, drawn into it along with the thin, cold, stimulating air of the north-land, which made any such incontinence as this merely impossible for Jan. And in his own man's way, perhaps Jim Willis had been similarly affected by his long years in the north.

But if Willis had travelled surrounded by a police patrol he could hardly have been better guarded than he was while Jan accompanied him. If a twig moved within a radius of a hundred yards of the spot where Willis slept, one at least of Jan's eye-lids would instantly lift, and stern watchful inquiry would gleam out over its crimson haw.

If any living creature, small or great, moved within an even wider radius of the camp, Jan would be on his feet in the same moment of time; not growling or snarling, but watching with a scrutiny which missed nothing

because it tested the surroundings by scent as well as sight; and Jan's sense of smell was more surely delicately penetrant than the vision of a lynx.

And in the earlier part of the night, while still the camp-fire burned brightly and before sleep came, Jan would lie musing by the hour together, watching Jim Willis and the fire, but seeing—it would be hard to say just how much beyond these things. For though there were animals in the north-land possessed of even greater physical subtlety than Jan's; there were none to approach him in the matter of imaginative scope, or in accumulated and inherited mentality.

The musings of Jan's team-mates rarely went beyond the affairs of their bellies. When Jan lay blinking at a camp-fire, or watching the smoke rise from Willis's pipe, his imagination and memory gave his mind pictures which embraced the Old World and the New, the old life and the present life; and, too, a host of other things which, though much more vague, yet tugged as strongly at his heart-strings, though they were not concrete and did not belong to his own individual life at all. His heritage of traditions was a great one; added to through many generations by a long illustrious line of notable hounds: the forbears of Finn the wolfhound and the Lady Desdemona.

Staring straight at rough and hardy Jim Willis, Jan would see, for so long as his mind confined itself to the actual figure before him, the master whose interests and concerns were his interests and concerns; the master who had not once failed him in the loyalty that a good

man owes to his dog; toward whom he, Jan, never failed in any one of the many-sided duties of the north-land dog.

But as the silent minutes slipped by, there in the heart of the wilderness which is so supremely indifferent to all such human inventions as time, Jan, still gazing at the form of Willis, would see group after group of other men-folk who had played their part, big or little, in his varied life. And while his imagination visualized these other men for musing Jan, he very truly did see them.

He would see those typical figures of human weakness and incompetence whose conduct seemed designed to establish the thesis that weakness and slackness were the real sin and curse of humanity; that ignorance was in truth the root of all suffering—*Chechaquo* Beeching and Harry his parasite. And at such a moment, the hair over musing Jan's shoulders would rise a little; the elastic rolling skin beneath would twitch and shrink.

He would see the masterful Jean and silent Jake, and sight of these men, hard and callous perhaps, but just and eminently able, would invariably bring up another picture: a white, hollow, clear patch in the deep woods; the gaunt black arms of trees frozn to their innermost hearts; overhead the icy flame of the aurora borealis, and afoot before him, Bill the killer, his eyes ablaze with murderous hate, his fanged jaws, swift as the wind, playing like winged knives about Jan's head and front.

In groups, melting one into another, Jan would see the fur-capped man who drove the buckboard wagon from Lambert's Siding; Overalls, in his greasy clothes, hunting

for the pen that lay behind his ear; a string of uniformed R.N.W.M.P. men, headed by the kindly O'Malley; alone then save for the hard-bitten wolf-like dog at his heels, Sergeant Moore, down-looking, dour, grim and forbidding.

And after the sergeant and his famous Sourdough, would come a swift change of background. For when Jan saw Dick Vaughan, as he very often did, he saw his sovereign lord—the lord whose memory made his heart to swell and his eyes to glisten as no later master's presence could, not even Willis's—dressed as in Canada, in scarlet tunic and yellow-striped breeches, but yet for some reason, always with an English background.

The vision of his sovereign lord placed all things else in solution for Jan. The north-land melted away, and about the lonely camp-fire rose the lighted walls of the big hall fire-place at Nuthill. Betty Murdoch was there with the master and—on the big couch it might be—the Mistress of the Kennels. Somewhere close at hand, Finn lay stretched at length, his long grey muzzle resting on his great paws.

Jan would sometimes whine, very soft and low, when this particular picture floated before him on the screen of his imagination. The mark of the breast-band across his massive front would rise and fall with swift vehemence; and into his hazel eyes would flood a mild light of tenderness most strangely foreign to his north-land surroundings.

A caress from Willis at such a time, had maybe brought in return to that hardy master of wild trails

something which as yet life had never given him. It might have given him the sort of love which, stronger than death, may not be described or discussed in words.

But the caress never came at these or any other times. It was not in Jim Willis to volunteer demonstrations of affection; true and kindly man that he was; and it was not in Jan, as the north-land had shapen him, to seek caresses.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PEACE RIVER TRAIL

WINTER set in with unusual rigour, the temperature dropping after heavy snow to fifty below zero, and hovering between thirty and sixty below for weeks together.

Jim Willis and his sled team lived on a practically "straight" meat diet. Jan had forgotten the taste of sun-dried salmon, and men and dogs together were living now on moose-meat chopped with an axe from the slabs and chunks that were stowed away on the sled. Willis occasionally treated himself to a dish of boiled beans, and when fortune favoured, he ate ptarmigan. But moose-meat was the staple for man and dogs alike.

For months the valleys they had traversed had been rich in game. But in the north-land the movements of game are mysterious and unaccountable; and now, in a bleak and gloomy stretch of country north of the Caribou Mountains, they had seen no trace of life of any kind for a fortnight except wolves. And of these, by day and by night, Jim Willis had seen and heard more than he cared about. It seemed the brutes had come from country quite unlike the valleys Willis had travelled, and resembling more nearly that in which he now found him-

self. For these wolves were gaunt and poor, and the absence of game made them more than normally audacious. So far from seeking to avoid man and his dogs, they seemed to infest Willis's trail, ranging emptily and wistfully to his rear and upon either side as hungry sharks patrol a ship's wake.

The circumstances would have had little enough of significance for Willis, but for an accident which befell just before the cold snap set in. Hastening along the track of a moose he had already mortally wounded, beside one of the tributaries of the Mackenzie, Willis had had the misfortune to take a false step among half-formed ice, and he and his gun had fallen into deep water. The bigger part of a day was given to the attempted salvaging of that gun. But in the end the quest had to be relinquished.

The gun was never seen again; and though Jim had good store of ammunition he now had no weapon of any sort or kind, save axe and whip. This was the reason why the presence of large packs of hungry wolves annoyed him, and made him anxious to reach a Peace River station as speedily as might be. He carried a fair stock of moose-meat, but accidents might happen, and in any case apart from the presence of hungry wolves in large numbers, no man cares to be without weapons of precision in the wilderness, for it is these which more than any other thing, give him his mastery over the predatory creatures of the wild.

Just before three o'clock in an afternoon of still, intense cold, when daylight was fading out, the narrow

devious water-course whose frozen surface had formed Willis's trail for many a mile, brought him at last to a bend of the Peace River from which he knew he could reach a settlement within four or five days of good travelling. Therefore his arrival at this point was of more interest and importance to Willis than any ordinary camping halt. But it struck him as curious that Jan should show the interest he did show in it.

"Seems like as if that blame dog knows everything," he muttered as he saw Jan trotting to and fro over the trail, his flews sweeping the trodden snow with eager questing gestures, his stern waving as with excitement of some sort.

"Surely there's been no game past this way," thought Willis; "or them wolves would be on to the scent of it pretty quick."

He could hear his tireless escorts of the past week yowling a mile or more away in the rear. Having built and lighted a fire of pine-knots, he called the dogs about him to be fed. Jan seemed disinclined to answer the call, being still busily questing to and fro. Willis had to call him separately and sternly.

"You stay right here," he said sharply. "This ain't no place for hunting excursions an' picnic parties, let me tell you. You're big an' husky all right; but the gentlemen out back there 'ld make no more o' downing an 'eatin' you than if you was a sody cracker, so I tell ye now. They're fifty to one and hungry enough to eat chips."

His ration swallowed, Jan showed an inclination to roam again, though his team mates, with ears pricked

and hackles rising in answer to the wolf calls, huddled about as near the camp-fire as they dared.

"H'm! 'Tain't jest like you to be contemplatin' suicide, neither; but it seems you've got some kind of a hunch that way to-night. Come here, then," said Willis.

And he proceeded to tether Jan securely to the sled, within a yard of his own sleeping place.

"If I'd my old gun here, me beauties," he growled, shaking his fist in the direction from which he had come that day, "I'd give some o' ye something to howl about, I reckon." Then to Jan: "Now you lie down there an' stay there till I loose ye."

Obediently enough, Jan proceeded to scoop out his nest in the snow, and settle. But it was obvious that he laboured with some unusual interest; some unseen cause of excitement.

Next morning it seemed Jan had forgotten his peculiar interest in the Peace River trail; his attention being confined strictly to the customary routine of harnessing and schooling the team.

But two hours later he did a thing that Willis had never seen him do before. He threw the team into disorder by coming to an abrupt standstill in mid-trail, without any hint of an order from his master. He was sniffing hard at the trail, turning sharply from side to side, his flews in the snow, while his nostrils avidly drank in whatever it was they found there, as a parched dog drinks at a water-hole.

"Mush on there, Jan! What ye playin' at?" cried Willis.

At the word of command, Jan plunged forward mechanically. But in the next moment he had halted again and, nose in the snow, wheeled sharply to the right, almost flinging on its side the dog immediately behind him in the traces.

For an instant Jim Willis wondered uncomfortably if his leader had gone mad. He had known sudden and apparently quite inexplicable cases of madness among sled-dogs; and like most others having any considerable experience of the trail, he had more than once had to shoot a dog upon whom madness had fallen. At all events before striding forward to the head of his team, Willis fumbled under the lashings of the sled and drew out the long-thonged dog-whip which for months now he had ceased to carry on the trail, finding no use for it under Jan's leadership of the team.

A glance now showed the cause of Jan's abrupt unordered right turn. Close to the trail Jim saw the fresh remains of a camp-fire beside the deep marks of a sled's runners.

"Well, an' what of it?" said he to Jan sharply. "'Tain't the first time you've struck another man's trail is it? What 'n the nation ails ye to be so het up about it, anyway."

And then, with his practised trailer's eyes he began to examine these tracks himself.

"H'm! Do seem kind o' queer, too," he muttered. "The sled's a middlin' heavy one, all right, only I don't see but one dog's track here, and that's onusu'l. Mus' be a pretty good husky, Jan, to shift that load on his own—eh? But

hold on! I reckon there's two men slep' here. But there's only one man's track on the trail, an' only one dog. Some peculiar, I allow: but this here stoppin' and turnin' an' playin' up is altogether outside the contrac', Jan. Clean contr'y to discipline. Come, mush on ther! D'ye hear me? Mush on, the lot o' ye."

It may be that, if he had had no reason for haste, Jim Willis would have gone farther in the matter of investigating Jan's peculiar conduct. As it was he saw every reason against delay and no justification for close study of a trail which he was desirous only of putting behind him. As a result he carried his whip for the rest of that day, and used it more often than it had been used in all the months since he first saw Jan. For contrary to all habit and custom, Jan seemed to-day most singularly indifferent to his master's wishes; and yet not indifferent either to these or to anything; but so much preoccupied with other matters as to be neglectful of these.

He checked frequently in his stride to sniff hard and long at the trail. And after one or two of these checks, Jim Willis sent the end of his whip-thong sailing through the keen air from his place beside the sled clear into Jan's flank by way of reminder and endorsement of his sharp: "Mush on there, Jan!"

When a halt was called for camping, as the early winter darkness set in, the unbelievable thing happened. Jan, the first dog to be loosed, took one long ardent sniff at the trail before him and then loped on ahead with never a backward glance for master or team-mates.

"Here, you, Jan! Come in here! Come right in here! D'ye hear me? Jan! Jan! You crazy? Come in here! Come—here!"

Jim Willis flung all his master's authority into the harsh peremptoriness of his last call. And Jan checked in his stride as he heard it. Then the hound shook his shoulders as though a whip-lash had struck them, sniffed hard again at the trail, and went on.

Willis caused his whip to sing, and himself shouted till he was hoarse. Jan, the perfect exemplar of sled-dog discipline, apparently defied him. The big hound was out of sight now.

"Well!" exclaimed Willis as he turned to unharness and feed his other dogs. And again: "Well!" And then, after a pause: "Now I know you're plumb crazy. But all the same—well, it's got me properly beat. Anyhow, crazy or no, I guess you're meat just the same, an' by the great Gee-whillikins, you'll be dead meat, an' digested meat at that, before you're an hour older, my son, if I know anything o' wolves."

Later, as he proceeded to thaw out his supper: "Well, I do reckon that's a blame pity," growled Willis, to his fire; by way of epitaph. And for Jim Willis that was saying a good deal.

Two wolves loping silent along

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE END OF JAN'S LONE TRAIL

WITH every stride in his solitary progress along that dark trail, Jan's gait and appearance took on more of certitude and of swift concentration upon an increasingly clear and definite objective.

Of the wolves in the neighbourhood all save two remained, uneasily ranging the neighbourhood of the trail to the rear of Willis's camp. As it seemed to them, Jim Willis's outfit was a sure and safe quarry. It represented meat which must, in due course, become food for them. And so they did not wish to leave it behind them, in a country bare of game.

Two venturesome speculators from the pack had, however, worked round to the front, one on either side of the trail. And these were now loping silent along, each sixty or seventy yards away, watching Jan. Jan was conscious of their presence, as one is conscious of the proximity of mosquitoes. He regarded their presence neither more nor less seriously than this. But he did not forget them. Now and again one or other of them would close in to, perhaps, twenty or thirty paces in a sweeping curve. Then Jan's lip would writhe and rise on the side

nearest the encroaching wolf, and a long, bitter snarl of warning would escape him.

"If I hadn't got important business in hand, I'd stop and flay you for your insolence," his snarl said. "I'll do it now, if you're not careful. Sheer off!"

And each time the wolf sheered off, in a sweeping curve, still keeping the lone hound under careful observation.

Wolves are very acute judges; desperate fighters for their lives, and when driven by hunger; but at no time really brave. If Jan had fallen by the way, these two would have been into him like knives. While he ran, exhibiting his fine powers, and snarled, showing his fearlessness, no two wolves would tackle him, and even the full pack would likely have trailed him for miles before venturing an attack.

But, however that might be, it is a fact that Jan spared no more than the most occasional odd ends of thought for these two silent, slinking watchers of his trail. His active mind was concentrated upon quite other matters, and was becoming more and more set and concentrated, more absorbingly preoccupied with every minute of his progress.

A bloodhound judge who had watched Jan now, would have known that he no longer sniffed the trail as he ran, for guidance. The trail was too fresh for that. He could have followed it with his nose held high in the air. It was for the sheer joy it brought him that he ran now with low-hanging flews, drinking in the scent he followed. And because of the warmth of the trail, Jan followed it

at the gallop, his great frame well extended to every stride.

Of a sudden he checked. It was exactly as though he had run his head into a noose on the end of a snare line made fast to one of the darkling trees which skirted his path on the right-hand side. Here the scent which he followed left the trail almost at right angles, turning into the wood.

A moment more, and Jan came into full view of a camp-fire, beside which were a sled, a single dog, and two men. But Jan saw no camp-fire, nor any other thing than the track under his questing nose.

The single dog by the sled leapt to its feet with a growling bark. One of the two men stood up sharply in the firelight, ordering his dog in to heel. His eyes (full of wonder) lighted then on the approaching figure of Jan, head down; and he reached for his rifle, where it lay athwart the log on which he had been sitting.

As Jan drew in, the other dog flew at his throat. Without wasting breath upon a snarl, Jan gave the husky his shoulder, with a jar which sent the poor beast sprawling into the red flickering edge of the fire. And in the same moment Jan let out a most singular cry, as he reared up on his hind feet, allowing his forepaws, very gently and without pressure, to rest on the man's chest.

His cry had something of a bark in it; but yet was not a bark. It had a good deal of a kind of crooning whine about it; but yet was not a whine. It was just a cry of almost overpowering joy and gladness; and it was so uncannily different from any dog talk she had ever heard,

that the singed and frightened husky bitch by the fire stood gaping open-mouthed to hearken at it.

And the man—long practised discipline made him lay down his gun, instead of dropping it; and then he voiced an exclamation of astonishment, scarcely more articulate than Jan's own cry; and his two arms swung out and around the hound's massive shoulders in a movement that was an embrace.

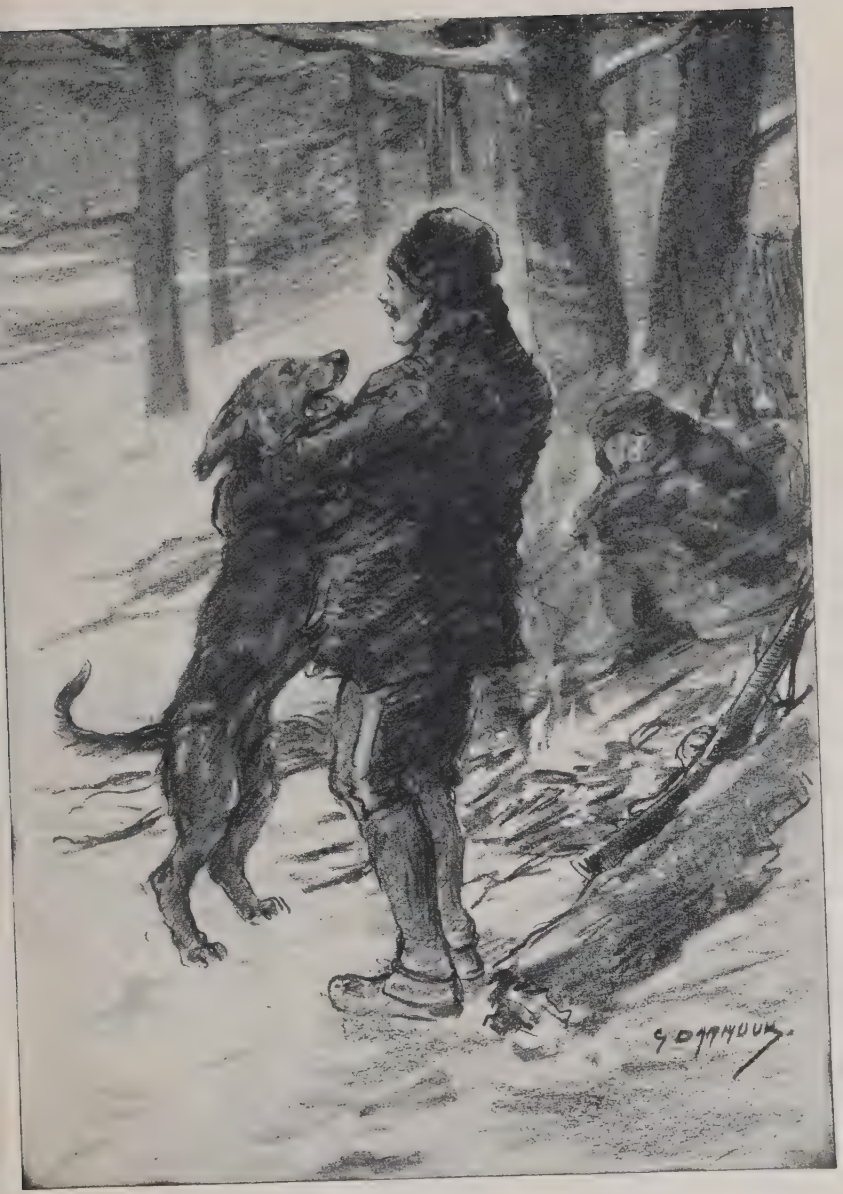
"Why, Jan—dear old Jan! Jan, come back to me—here! Good old Jan!"

It was with something strangely like a sob that the bearded sergeant Dick Vaughan sank down to a sitting position on the log, with Jan's head between his hands.

His beard was evidence of a longish spell on the trail; and the weakness that permitted of his catching his breath in a childlike sob—that was due, perhaps, to solitude, and the peculiar strain of his present business on the trail, as well as to the great love he felt for the hound he had thought lost to him for ever.

"How d'ye do, Devil! How d'ye do! We were just hurryin' on for your place. Will ye take a drop o' rye? I'm boss here. That's only my chore-boy you're slobberin' over, Mister Devil. Eh, but it's hunky down to Coney Island, ain't it?"

These remarks came in a jerky sort of torrent from the second man, one of whose peculiarities was that his arms above the elbow were lashed with leather thongs to his body. There were leather hobbles about his ankles; and on the ground near by him lay a pair of unlocked handcuffs, carefully swathed in soft-tanned deerskin.



Found

Sergeant Dick Vaughan's companion may possibly have accentuated the solitude in which he travelled; such a companion could hardly have mitigated it, as a source of nervous strain, for he was mad as a March hare. But there was nothing else hare-like about him, for he was homicidally mad, and had killed two men, and half killed a third, before Sergeant Vaughan laid hands upon him. And his was not the only madness the sergeant had had to contend with on this particular trip.

A strong and over-tired man's weakness is not a thing that any one cares to enlarge upon; but, without offence, it may perhaps be stated that tears fell on the iron-grey hair of Jan's muzzle, as he stood there with his soft flews pressed hard against Dick Vaughan's thigh. It seemed he wanted to bore right into the person of his sovereign lord; he, who had never asked for any man's caress, through all the long months of wandering, toil and hardship that divided him from the Regina barracks. His nose burrowed lovingly under Dick's coat with never a thought of fear, or of a trap; although, for many months now, his first instinct had been to keep his head free, vision clear, and feet to the ground, whatever befell.

"My old Jan! My dear old Jan!"

Dick Vaughan paid no sort of heed to the jerky maunderings of his poor demented charge. But Jan did. Without stirring his head, Jan edged his body away at right-angles from the madman; and the hair bristled over his shoulder-blades when the man spoke.

Jan did not know much about human ailments, perhaps; but he had seen a husky go mad, and had narrowly

escaped being bitten by the beast before Jim Willis had shot it. He did not think it out in any way, but he was intuitively conscious that this man was abnormal, irresponsible, unlike other men. The homicidal devil was the force uppermost in this particular man; and that naturally left no room for emanations of the milk of human kindness and goodness. Jan was instantly aware of the lack. In effect he knew this man was killing mad.

But remarkable, nay unique, in his experience as the contact was, Jan spared no thought for it. His hackles rose a little and he edged away from the madman, because instinct in him enforced so much. For his mind and his heart, they were filled to overflowing; they were afloat on the flood-tide of his consciousness of his sovereign's physical presence, the touch of his body.

The night was far spent when Dick Vaughan proceeded to tether his prisoner as comfortably as might be, and to stretch himself in his blankets for sleep. Jan may have slept a little that night, but his eyes were never completely closed for more than a minute at a stretch; and his muzzle, resting on his paws, was never more than three feet from Dick's head. It was to be noted, too, that he chose to lie between Dick and the madman, although the proximity of the latter was more than a little painful to Jan.

Towards morning, when the fire was practically out, the husky bitch came timidly nosing about Jan's neighbourhood; and Jan breathed through his nose at her in quite friendly fashion. But when she happened to place one foot across the direct line in which the hound watched

his sovereign's face—then Jan growled; so low and softly as not to waken Dick and yet with a significance which the husky instantly comprehended and acted on.

"Anywhere else you like, but not between my lord and me; for he is mine, and I am his; not to be divided."

So said Jan's low, throaty growl. And the husky, comprehending, withdrew, and dug herself a place in the snow under Jan's lee; which, as the big hound thought, was well and fittingly done. He gave the bitch an approving glance from the tail of one eye.

The pride of Jan, like his happiness, was just now deep beyond all reach of plummets.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"SO LONG, JAN!"

THE way in which Jan brought Jim Willis and Dick Vaughan together that morning was notable and strange.

In finding Dick, Jan had found all he wanted in life. But at the back of his mind was a sort of duty thought which made it clear to him that he must let Willis know about these things, if possible. Willis had undoubted and very strong claims upon the leader of his team, and Jan, at this stage of his North American life and discipline, was not the dog to ignore those claims. He wanted Jim Willis to know. He desired absolution. And, short of letting Dick out of his sight—a step which no threat or inducement would have led him to take—Jan was going to set this matter right.

The outworking of his determination, in the first place, caused a number of delays; and then, when by affectionate play of one kind and another he could no longer keep Dick from the trail, he set to work to try and drag or seduce his lord back over his tracks of the previous day. Now Dick was far too well versed in doggy ways to make the mistake of supposing that Jan was indulging

mere wantonness. He knew very well that Jan was not that sort of a dog.

"H'm! And then, again, old chap, as I said last night, you can't have dropped from Heaven upon the trail beneath. There must be somebody else where you've come from. I see the collar- and trace-marks on your old shoulders—bless you! What would Betty say to them, old son? So don't excite yourself. We'll wait a bit, and see what happens. I could do with the help of a team, I can tell you, for my own shoulder's bruised to the bone from the trace. You take it from me, Jan; one man and one husky is no sort of a team. No, sir, no sort of a team at all. So sit down, my son, and let me fill a pipe."

Naturally enough, Dick thought he waited, as the result of his own reflections, to see what things the trail Jan had travelled by would bring forth. But, all the same, he would not have waited but for Jan's artful insistence on it. Sometimes, but not very often, a dog acquires such guile in the world of civilization. In the wild it comes easily and naturally, even to animals having but a tithe of Jan's exceptional intelligence and wealth of imagination.

Dick Vaughan had not waited long there beside the trail, when his ears and Jan's caught the sound of Jim Willis's voice and the singing of his whip. Evidently, in the absence of their leader, Jan's team-mates had not settled down very well to the day's work. In the distance, away back on the trail, could be heard now and again the howl of a wolf.

Jim Willis showed no surprise when, in response to a

wave of Dick's hand, he drew up his team alongside a R.N.W.M.P. man and his own missing team-leader. Jim was not much given to showing surprise in the presence of other men. He nodded his comprehension, as Dick told the story of Jan's appearance on the previous evening, and of his disappearance, many months before, from Lambert's Siding in Saskatchewan.

"It's a bit of a miracle that I should find him again —or he find me, rather—away up here, isn't it?" said Dick.

"Ah! Pretty 'cute sort of a dog Jan," said the laconic Jim.

He was noting—one cannot tell with what queer twinges, with what stirrings of the still deeps of his nature—the fact that, while Jan lolled a friendly tongue at him, and waved his stern when Jim spoke, he yet remained, as though tied, with his head at Sergeant Vaughan's knee.

The two men leaned against Jim's sled and exchanged samples of tobacco while Dick briefly told the tale of his travels, with his mad charge, from a lonely silver-mining camp near the Great Slave Lake. It seemed Dick had had real ground for fearing that he had stumbled upon some horrible kind of epidemic of madness in the lone land he had been traversing. At all events, one of the team of seven huskies with which he started had developed raging madness within a day or so of the beginning of his journey, and had had to be shot.

"I couldn't find that the brute had bitten any of the others, but next day two of 'em suddenly went clean off,

and they certainly did bite another pair before I shot them. Next day I had to kill the other pair, and was expecting every minute to see the bitch, the only one left, break out. However, she seems to have escaped it."

Dick said nothing of the weary subsequent days in which he himself had toiled hour after hour in the traces, ahead of his one dog, with a maniac wrapped in rugs and lashed on the sled-pack. But Jim Willis needed no telling. He saw the trace marks all across the chest and shoulders of Dick's coat, and he knew without any telling all about the corresponding mark that must be showing on Dick's own skin.

"Well, say," he remarked admiringly; "but you do seem to 've bin up against it good an' hard."

Very briefly, and as though the matter barely called for mention, Dick explained, in answer to an inquiry, why he had to make a dead burden of the madman.

It seemed that when first his team had been reduced to one rather under-sized dog, he did arrange for his charge to walk. And within an hour, having cunningly awaited his opportunity, the demented creature had leaped upon him from behind, exactly as a wolf might, and fastened his teeth in Dick's neck. That, though Dick said little of it, had been the beginning of a strange and terrible struggle, of which the sole observer was a single sled-dog.

To and fro in the trampled snow the men had swayed and fought for fully a quarter of an hour, before Dick had finally mastered the madman and bound him hand and foot. He was a big man, of muscular build, and mad-

ness had added hugely to his natural capabilities as a fighter. Dick Vaughan's bandaged neck, and his right thumb, bitten through to the bone, would permanently carry the marks of this poor wretch's ferocity, in that lonely struggle on the trail.

"Don't seem right, somehow," was Jim Willis's comment. "I guess I'd have had to put a bullet into him."

"Ah, no; that wouldn't do at all," said Dick.

He did not attempt to explain just why; and perhaps he hardly could have done so had he tried; for that would have involved some explanation of the pride and the traditions of the force in which he served; and these are things rarely spoken of by those who understand them best, and are most influenced by them.

"And where might you be making for now?" asked Jim.

"Well, I'm bound for Edmonton. But since I got down to this one little husky, I'd thought of making Fort Vermilion, to see if I could raise a team there."

"Aye. Well, I was bound for steel at Edmonton, too; an' I've bin reckoning on some such a place as Fort Vermilion since I lost my gun," said Jim. "I'm wholly tired o' making trail for these gentlemen behind"—the howling of the wolves was still to be heard pretty frequently—"without a shootin'-iron of any kind at all."

"It seems to me we're pretty well met, then," said Dick, with a smile; "for I want what you've got, and you want what I've got."

"Well, I was kind o' figuring on it that sort of a way myself," admitted Jim. "If it suits you, I guess we

can make out to rub along on your Jan an' my dogs right through to Edmonton."

In the end, the order of the march was arranged thus: two of Jim Willis's dogs, with Jan to lead them, were harnessed to Dick's sled, with the madman and Dick's rugs for its load. The remainder of Dick's pack was loaded on Jim's sled and drawn by Jim's other three dogs, aided by the sole survivor of Dick's team. And in this order a start was made on the five hundred mile run to Edmonton.

Among other advantages this arrangement appealed greatly to Jan, because it gave him the opportunity he desired of showing his sovereign what he could do as a team-leader. For Jan, there was a deep and incommunicable joy in the simple process of receiving orders to "Haw!" or to "Mush on!" from the lips of his own sovereign lord.

So greatly did this subtle joy move Jan, that he rarely remembered to administer any fillips to the two dogs who pulled behind him. With Dick's loved voice thrilling in his ears, he would have made light work of drawing that sled—with its tragical load—unaided. As it was, his mates had a tolerably easy time; for Jan, too joyously exalted to observe them very closely, by his own magnificent strength kept their traces taut as harp-strings; and at night was too busy watching over his sovereign to attend to any rebukes they may have earned.

On the evening of the first joint camp, Jim Willis, with the light of long-postponed vengeance in his eyes, borrowed Dick's rifle and proceeded, as he said, to "lay up

for them pesky wolves." The gun was a magazine rifle, and, as the result of quick and expert manipulation, Jim managed to account for no fewer than four of the most presumptuous of the wolf pack; a fact which so startled and discouraged the others, that, having seen to the economical interment and digestion of their fallen friends, they forsook that trail altogether, and troubled Jim no more.

In the daytime conversation between Dick and Jim was confined to, perhaps, half-a-dozen terse remarks tossed over the trail from the rear of one sled to the other. But the evening hours over the camp-fire were prolonged past the stage at which either man would have been sleeping soundly, had he been alone on the trail.

In these hours, while the other dogs were curled in their sleeping-nests, generally quite hidden in the snow, and Jan lay close in between the fire and the sleds, watching the faces of the two men who both had been his masters, Dick Vaughan and Jim Willis came to know each other very well, and to acquire, each for the other, a very real respect.

Custom soon made Jim indifferent to the hectic maunderings of the madman (who, curiously enough, seemed in good general health, and ate voraciously), and he came to talk more freely and fully with the English sergeant of the R.N.W.M.P. than he had talked with any one else for many a long day. Naturally, the question of Jan's ownership cropped up between them at an early stage. Dick inquired as to the circumstances in which Jim had purchased Jan, and the price paid. In that way he learned

of the memorably disastrous trip of Beeching and Harry. But Jim was as reticent over his part in the restoration of Jan's life as Dick had been over his care of the homicidal maniac, and his trace-work as a sled-puller.

Withal, Dick was shrewd enough to form his own impressions in this matter; and, with fingers sunk in the soft skin at the roots of Jan's ears, he told the hound how he must never forget the debt he owed the man who had given him back his life.

From the first, Jim showed frankly that there was to be no question as to Jan's ownership. He told how Jock, back there on the edge of the North Pacific, had informed him as to Jan's name and identity, from a picture seen in a newspaper. Then Dick broached the question of how much he was to pay for Jan, seeing clearly how just was the other man's claim as lawful owner of the hound. Jim laughed quietly at this.

"Why, no," he said; "I haven't just come to makin' dollars out of other folks' dog-stealin'. No, sir. But it's true enough I have paid, in a way, for Jan; an' I guess there's not another son of a gun in Canada, but his rightful owner, with money enough to buy the dog from me. I'd not 've sold him. And I'll not sell him now—because a sun-dried salmon could see he's yours a'ready. But I'll tell you what: I'm short of a gun, an' I've kinder taken a fancy to this one o' yours—I reckon because I'd had such a thirst on me for one before I struck your trail. Jan is yours, anyway; but if you'd like to give me your gun to remember ye by, I'll say 'Thank you!' "

"Well, I'm sorry, but I can't make out to give you the

gun, anyway," said Dick, "because it isn't mine. It's an R.N.W.M.P. gun. But you wait another day or two, my friend, and when we've got shut of this gentleman in Edmonton"—with a nod in the direction of the madman —"you and I will give an hour or so to finding out the best gun in the city; and when we've found it, we'll have your name engraved on it, and underneath: 'From Jan, the R.N.W.M.P. hound, to the man who saved his life.' I know you'll take a keepsake from Jan, boy."

And so it was arranged. Jim would not hear of any selling or buying of the hound; but in Edmonton, where he sold his sled and team, preparatory to taking train for the western seaboard, he accepted, as gift from Jan, the best rifle Dick could find, inscribed as arranged; and, as gift from Dick, a photograph of himself and Jan together.

Their parting was characteristic of life in the North-West. Each man knew that in all human probability he would never again set eyes upon the other. Yet they parted as intimate friends; for their coming together—again most typical of north-western life—had been of the kind which leads swiftly to close friendship—or to antipathy and hostility.

Dick, greatly impressed by the other man's solid worth, urged upon him the claims of the R.N.W.M.P. as offering a career for him.

"For you," said Dick, "the work would all be simple as print; plain sailing all the way."

Jim Willis, like most north-land men, had a very real respect for the R.N.W.M.P., but he smiled at the idea of joining the force.

"But why?" asked Dick. "It would be such easy work for you."

"Aye, I'll allow the work wouldn't exactly hev me beat," agreed Jim. "But—— Oh, well, I ain't a Britisher, to begin with; an' what's more to the p'int, a week in barracks 'ld choke me."

"But they'd be wise enough to keep you pretty much on the trail; and you're at home there."

"Yes, I guess the trail's about as near home as I'll ever get, mebbe; but I'd have no sorter use for it if I j'ined your bunch."

"How's that?"

"Well, now, I guess that 'ld be kinder hard to explain to you, Dick."

(In the north-land, between men, it is always either Christian names, or "Mister.")

"You see, we was raised different, you an' me; an' what comes plum nateral to you would set me kickin' like a steer, first thing I'd know. The trail suits me, all right, yes. But I hit it when I want to, an' keep off it when I'm taken that-a-way. I'm only a poor man; but ther' isn't a millionaire in America can buy the right to say: 'Come here,' or 'Go there,' to me, Dick; an', what's more, thar' ain't goin' to be; not while I can sit up an' eat moose. It's mebbe not the best kind of an outfit; an' then again, it's mebbe not jest the worst; but, any ol' way you like, Dick, it's the only kind of an outfit I've got."

Dick nodded sympathetically.

"Why yes, you can see it stickin' out all over. Look at that little dust-up with the lun*at*ic. Well, now, I should

jest 've pumped that gentleman as full o' lead as ever he'd hold. 'You'd bite me,' I'd ha' said. 'Well, Mister Luna*t*ic,' I'd ha' said, 'I count you no more'n a mad husky; an' when I see a mad husky, I shoot. So you take this,' I'd ha' said; and plugged him up good an' full. But for you—well, I see how it is. He's a kind of a sacred duty, an' all the like o' that. Yes, I know; only—only I'm not built that kind of a way, ye see."

And Jim was right, and Dick knew he was right. As white and straight and true a man as any in the north, and able to the tips of his fingers and toes; but—but not the "kind of an outfit" for the R.N.W.M.P.

And so they parted, on a hard hand-grip. And to Jan, Jim Willis gave a grim, appraising sort of a stare, and (spoken very gruffly) these words—

"Well, so long, Jan! The cards is yours, all right, an' I guess you take the chips!"

He did not touch the big hound as he spoke. But then, despite their long and close association, he never had touched Jan in the way of a caress.

CHAPTER XL

BACK TO REGINA

LONG before Sergeant Dick Vaughan—he was always spoken of thus, by both his names—arrived at the R.N.W.M.P. headquarters in Regina, news was received there of his strange single-handed journey from the Great Slave Lake, of the mad murderer, the mad dogs, of the sergeant's own toil in the traces, and of his being tracked down by Jan.

The surgeon in Edmonton who attended to Dick's badly wounded and poisoned neck and right thumb, happened to be a man with a strong sense of the picturesque, and a quite journalistic faculty for visualizing incidents of a romantic or adventurous nature.

An *Edmonton Bulletin* reporter, in quest of a "story" for his paper, had the good luck to corner the surgeon in his consulting-room. The result took the form of promotion for that reporter, following upon publication in the *Bulletin* of a many-headed three-column article which was quoted and reproduced all up and down America. Summaries of the "story" were cabled to Europe. Snapshots of Dick and Jan were obtained by enterprising pressmen in Edmonton, and distributed quite profitably for their owners to the ends of all the earth. Many months

afterwards extracts and curiously garbled versions of this north-land Odyssey cropped up in the news-sheets of Siam, the Philippines, Mauritius, Paraguay, and all manner of odd places.

Their London morning newspaper presented the matter at some length to the Nuthill household, and to Dr. Vaughan in Sussex, while Dick and Jim Willis, five or six thousand miles away, were choosing a rifle to have Jan's name inscribed upon it.

As a fact, the subject-matter of the story was sufficiently striking in character; for in a temperature of fifty below zero, with no other help than a little undersized husky bitch can give, it is no small matter for one man to drag a laden sled for twelve days whilst looking after a maniac who has come very near to killing him.

To this was added the romantic recovery of the famous "R.N.W.M.P. bloodhound," as Jan was called; and that aspect of the business brought special joy to the newspaper writers. To some extent also, no doubt, it coloured Dick's addition to R.N.W.M.P. records, and caused that addition to figure more strikingly than it might otherwise have done in the archives of the corps.

A quaint thing about it all was the fact that everyone else knew more about it than the two men most concerned; for it happened that neither Dick Vaughan nor Jim Willis had ever cultivated the newspaper habit. Willis was hugely startled and embarrassed, hundreds of miles away in Vancouver to find himself suddenly famous.

In Edmonton Dick Vaughan presented a very stern front to the snap-shotters because he conceived the idea that he and Jan were being guyed in some way. By the reporters he was presently given up as hopeless, because he simply declined to tell them anything. Their inquiries touched his professional pride as a disciplined man, and they were told that Dick could have nothing whatever to say to them with regard to his official duties. But his innocence made surprisingly little difference in the long run. The surgeon's story was real journalistic treasure-trove; the richest possible kind of mine for ingenious writers to delve in; and after all the most determined reticence in no way affects the working of cameras.

Withal, the welcome prepared for Dick and Jan at Regina station was hardly less than alarming, for one of the two men in Canada and the United States who had not read the newspapers.

"You'll excuse my saying so, sir," explained Dick in a flustered aside to Captain Arnutt, "but this is the very devil of a business I—surely I haven't got to say anything!"

The civilian crowd at the station was good-humouredly shouting for a "speech"; cameras were clicking away like pom-poms, and the Regina pressmen were gripping Dick almost savagely by either arm; showing considerable personal bravery thereby, for Jan growled very threateningly as their hands touched the sergeant's tunic, and in common humanity, Dick was forced to grab the famous hound by the neck and give him urgent orders to control his wrath.

As Dick subsequently explained to Captain Arnutt, the thing struck him as the more awkward because, having found Jan, he desired now to be allowed to resign from the force as he wanted to return to England.

"But, hang it, man, you've been gazetted a full Sergeant-Inspector and—unofficially, of course—I'm told we are only waiting word from Ottawa about offering you commissioned rank."

Dick shrugged his shoulders in comic despair. His speech was finally delivered from the perilous eminence of a booking-clerk's stool; an elevation which Jan so gravely mistrusted that he felt impelled to rise erect on his hind feet, placing both fore-paws beside his lord's raised heels, and thereby providing the camera men with the most famous of all the snap-shots yet obtained.

The speech, as literally recorded in shorthand by one of Regina's most promising young pressmen, if not a very finished or distinguished effort, was clearly a hardy and quick growing production, since it did eventually develop into a long half-column in some newspapers. According to the unimaginative and literal stenographic record aforementioned. It was as follows—

"It's very good of you fellows—er—Right you are, sir! er—ladies and gentlemen!—But, really, you know, I can't make a speech. It's no use. I—er—I'm tremendously obliged to you all. What you say is—er—Well, the fact is I've only done what any other man in the service would have done. It's splendid to see you all again and—I *have* brought back the Mounted Police Dog. Thank you!"

And according to the shorthand man, that was all. But a generous sub-editorial fraternity understood the speech differently; and newspaper readers doubtless came to the conclusion that oratory must now be added to the other accomplishments of the versatile R.N.W.M.P.

There were no embarrassing call for speeches at the barracks; but even there, Dick (still closely attended by Jan, upon whom one of the impressions produced by his return to the complex conditions of civilization was an anxious fear that his sovereign lord would somehow be spirited away from him if he ever let Dick out of his sight) was called upon to face a raking fire of compliments from his commanding officer, delivered in the presence of a full muster of commissioned and non-commissioned ranks.

"You have done your duty finely as a sergeant of the Royal North West Mounted Police; and for us who know what it means, I don't know that the ablest man in the country can hope to earn higher praise than that."

Those were the Chief's concluding words; and the full-throated if somewhat hoarse cheer which they elicited from the men assembled behind Dick and Jan, as well as from the group beside the Chief, had the curious effect of filling Dick's eyes with moisture of a sort that pricked most painfully; so that as he came to the salute before retiring, he saw the familiar building in front of him but dimly, as through a fog.

CHAPTER XLI

THE FALL OF SOURDOUGH

JUST before darkness fell that evening, Captain Arnutt called Dick from his quarters and asked him to go for a stroll. Together, and closely followed by Jan, they started. Before the barracks gate was reached they were met by Sergeant Moore, with Sourdough at his heels.

Sourdough had aged a good deal during the past year; but despite the twist in his near fore-leg which caused him to limp slightly, the old dog still held his own as despotic ruler of all the dogs in that locality. But for a good many years he had done no work of any kind; neither had he had any very serious fighting, or come in contact with north-land dogs. His swiftest movements would have seemed clumsy and slow to the working husky, inured to the comparative wildness of trace life in the north. But his morose arrogance and ferocity had suffered no diminution, as was shown by the fact that he flew straight for Jan's throat directly he set eyes on the big hound.

"Call your dog off, Sergeant; or he'll be killed," shouted Dick.

Sergeant Moore spake no word. In his queer heart,

intelligence of Dick's fame rankled bitterly; yet not so bitterly as the fact of Jan's return to barracks. His obsession made him certain in his own mind that the redoubtable Sourdough could certainly kill any dog. And so he spake no word while Sourdough flew at Jan.

And for Jan, as he caught sight in the gloaming of his ancient enemy, his hackles had risen very stiffly, his pendant lips had twitched ominously.

Jan was perfectly well aware that the killing of Sourdough or any other dog he had seen since his return to cities, would be a supremely easy matter for him. Indeed it would be for almost any dog having his experience of the wild. And having in his simple dog mind no shadow of a reason for sparing Sourdough, of all creatures that walked, one may take it that Jan savoured with some joyousness the prospect of the killing which Sourdough's snarling rush presented to him.

He received that rush with a peculiar screwing thrust of his left shoulder; the commonest trick among fighting dogs in the north-land; but one for which old Sourdough seemed totally unprepared; since he made no apparent preparation to withstand it; and as an inevitable consequence, was rolled clean over on his back by the force of his own impetus, scientifically met.

That, by all the rules in the north-land game of which Jan was a past-master, brought Sourdough within seconds of his end. The throat was exposed; the deadly underhold, given which no dog breathing could evade Jan.

And at that moment came Dick's voice, in very urgent and meaning exhortation.

"Back, Jan! Don't kill him. He's too old. Back—here —Jan!"

Jan's jaws had parted for the killing grip. His whole frame was perfectly poised for the thrust from which no dog placed as Sourdough was could possibly escape. A swift shudder passed through him as though his sovereign's words reached him on a cold blast; and stiff-legged, wondering, his shoulder hair all erect, and jaws still parted for the fray, Jan stepped back to Dick's side.

"You'll have to keep that old tough in to heel if you mean to save him, Sergeant," said Captain Arnutt. "You can't expect Jan to lie down to him. Why don't you keep him in to heel, man?"

The sergeant passed on, saluting, without a word. Doubtless he had liefer far that Captain Arnutt had hit him in the face. But when all is said, no words could hurt this curious monomaniac now; after that which he had seen with his own eyes, and that which he now saw.

Complete enlightenment had come to old Sourdough in one fraction of a moment. In the moment when he reached earth, on his back, flung there by his impact with the calculated screwing thrust of Jan's massive shoulder, Sourdough knew that his day was over. He expected to die then and there; and was prepared to die. Contact with Jan had told him in a flash things which could not be written in a page. He tasted in that moment the cold-drawn pitiless efficiency of the methods of the north-land wild, and realized that he could no more stand against this new Jan than a lady's house-bred lap-dog could have

stood against himself. As his feet left the ground his life was ended; as Sourdough saw it.

And then had come Jan's miraculous, shuddering withdrawal, wholly inexplicable; chilling to the heart in its uncanny unexpectedness. Sourdough mechanically regained his footing; and then with low-hung head, inward-curling tail and crouching shoulders, he slunk away at the heel of his bitterly disappointed master. The collapse of this old invincible within a few seconds, was a rather horrid sight, and a very strange and startling one.

From that hour, Sourdough was never again seen in the precincts of the R.N.W.M.P. barracks; and though many people puzzled over the old dog's disappearance, none ever knew what became of him. The sergeant had been for some time entitled to retire from the service. That night he obtained his commanding officer's permission to do so.

CHAPTER XLII

THE TOWN IS HARDER THAN THE TRAIL

CAPTAIN ARNUTT proved himself a friend indeed to Dick Vaughan. Once he had come to understand the position, he fully sympathized with Dick's wish to leave the service at once, and return to England. That sympathy he proceeded forthwith to translate into action; and within the month, Sergeant-Inspector Dick Vaughan had received his discharge and booked his passage—with Jan's—for England.

Jan, who knew nothing of these matters, and was concerned now mainly with the problem of never losing sight of his sovereign lord, had found his return to the ways of civilization bristling with complications.

There had been a time, and not so very long since either, as humans reckon these things, when the life of the trail, as shown to him by Jean, had seemed to Jan a thing of infinite and complex difficulty. This had been largely due, of course, to the fact that on the trail and under the leadership of a dog like Bill, Jan had had to maintain all his faculties at concert pitch, for the mere preservation of his own body and life; while at the same time learning and acting with constant watchful alertness to preserve his skin from the lash that told of human disapproval.

But all those matters, including the complete mastery

of his team-mates and the fighting knowledge which made him secure from the attacks of any other dog, had long since become as a second nature to Jan. The trail life, always rigorous, had become simple.

The problems of civilization were different. They depended upon so many various and often conflicting factors over which Jan had no sort of control. And so for a time he found them rather wearingly difficult.

In Edmonton Jan had killed two misguided—but upon the whole well-meaning—house-dogs, before he began to realize the extreme deadliness in this place of the tactics which had become natural for him; or the extreme tenderness of civilization's animals by comparison with the agile hardihood of the creatures of the wilderness. It was as though they moved in a dream, these soft, slow, petted animals without coat or skin worth speaking of, or any other sort of shield between their life-blood and the fangs of a dog who really knew his own mind, and how to use the powers with which Nature had endowed him.

It falls to be remembered here that every dog Jan met in the city streets became his enemy on sight. His appearance and size were against him; being strange and therefore hateful to the dogs he met. But over and above this immediate ground of antipathy, and far more potent than it, was the fact that to the noses of the town dogs, Jan's mere proximity was redolent of the unknown, the outside, the wild. Therefore, like any other creature of the wild, he was a thing to be flown at, pounced upon, bitten, and if possible, slain.

Dick, his sovereign, had remonstrated very seriously indeed with Jan in the matter of the dogs he slew in Edmonton. And quite apart from this, Jan, whose bed-rock nature was essentially kind and non-ferocious, had been almost alarmed by the uncanny simplicity with which these creatures yielded up their lives to his swift resentment of their stupid attacks. To him they were like unfledged chickens; and he had no earthly wish to kill such helpless things. Still, it was all very confusing; for though these animals might be helpless as slugs before his wrath, yet they came at one in the first place, like very warriors, with portentous snarls and wildly snapping jaws.

But it was the number of people and animals, their appalling density that most embarrassed Jan at first. The traffic of the city streets made him bristle as though he had found himself in the seething centre of a wolf-pack. Danger threatened him upon every side; worse than this even, insufferably close contact threatened him; and worst of all, innumerable perils threatened his sovereign lord: Dick.

Persons, animals and vehicles were all cunningly striving to thrust themselves, if only for a moment, between Jan and his lord; and the first of all motives in life with Jan, since that memorable night upon the Peace River trail, had been the prevention, by hook or by crook, of that very thing: the coming of any creature or thing between his lord and himself. Inevitably then, Jan was kept pretty busy.

But if, as is undoubtedly the case, life in the north-

land wild does make for a certain savagery in those who are called to the service of trail and trace, who live under the dominion of toil and frost and thong; then it is equally certain that the same life makes surely and strongly for a finely strung, perfectly tuned amenability to discipline; an instant and unswerving responsiveness to control.

Dick had flattered himself that Jan was exceptionally well trained and controlled, when he had landed in Canada. And so he had been; for a home-bred English dog. But his training up till that time had been an amateurish thing indeed, beside the training he had had in the wilderness; where the littlest of penalties generally involves bloodshed, and the wages of most real lapses is death.

There were no lapses in Jan's life now. Obedience followed so instantly upon receipt of an order as to be, to all seeming, an integral part of the command itself; and Dick learned to be both sparing and careful of his orders, for no matter what they might be, he found they were acted upon in the moment the words left his lips, and long before any modification of them would have been possible.

It would not have done for Dick jestingly to bid Jan "go to," or attack a moving locomotive, meaning then to recall him and explain the joke. Jan would have attacked a battleship, or jumped over the edge of Niagara at Dick's word of command.

It was this that made the abrupt transition—in a single day—from the trail to the city a possible one for Jan;

and one which, while it tried him greatly, brought no serious disaster in its train, such as so abrupt and revolutionary a change had surely brought, but for the enduring virtues of the iron discipline of the trail.

"We're learnin', Jan, we're learnin' fast, old chap," said Dick Vaughan; when, during their second or third walk down Jaspar Street in Edmonton, he stroked Jan's ears as a reward for looking straight ahead, with never a blink of his eyelids or the slightest movement of his head, while receiving the furiously yapping onslaught of a toy Pomeranian whose back-bone he could have broken with one clip of his great jaws.

Dick had seen the noisy, furry little tormentor in time, and given Jan a warning order before this miniature whirlwind could fall upon him.

CHAPTER XLIII

HOW JAN CAME HOME

DESPITE his elation over the prospect before him, Dick found the actual parting with his comrades in Regina a good deal of a wrench. They were fond of him, and of Jan, and proud of both. And Dick found when the packing was over and valedictory remarks begun, that these men had entered pretty deeply into his life and general scheme of things.

They were good fellows all, these hard, spare, long-limbed riders of the plains; and they and the North-west had made of the Dick who was now bidding them good-bye, a man radically different in a hundred ways from the careless, irresponsible, light-hearted Dick, who had come to them a few years back, direct from kindly, indulgent Sussex.

Dick had become a fit and proper part of his western environment, and had "made good" in it, as the saying is. We most of us like doing that which we do well. Dick's mature and able manhood had come to him in the West. He would never lose it now, however far eastward he might travel. But—the West and its good folk tugged pretty hard at his heart-strings, as from the rear platform of his car on the east-bound train, he watched

the waving stiff-brimmed hats of his comrades, and a little later the last of the roofs of Saskatchewan's capital fading out in the distance.

Hard land as many have found it; hard though it had been in many ways for Dick; the North-west had forced its bracing stimulating spirit into his being and made him the man he was; just so surely as the north-land wilderness had made of Jan the wonderful hound he now was.

And Dick left it all with a swelling heart; not unwillingly, because he was going to a great promised happiness, but with a swelling heart none the less, and a kind of mistiness of vision, due in great measure to the real respect, the sincere gratitude he felt toward the land and life and people who had helped him to make of himself a very much bigger and better man than any previous efforts of his had promised to evolve out of the same material in Sussex, for example.

Winter ruled still in the land, and so the actual seaboard—Halifax—and not the big St. Lawrence port, was rail-head for Dick and Jan. But for Jan the enforced confinement of the journey was greatly softened by regular daily visits from his lord. And in Halifax two and a half days of almost unbroken companionship awaited them before their steamer left.

This homeward journey was a totally different matter for Jan from the outward trip. It was true he gave no thought to England as yet. But he perfectly understood the general idea of travel. He knew that he and his lord were on a journey together; that certain temporary separations were an unavoidable feature of this sort of

travelling; and that, the journey done, the two of them would come together again. The sum of Jan's knowledge, his reasoning powers and his faculties of observation and deduction were an hundredfold greater now than at the time of his departure from England.

Jan loathed the close confinement of his life at sea; but he did not rebel against it; neither was he cast down by it. He knew that it was to be no more than a brief interlude; and he understood quite well that though, unfortunately, men-folk had so arranged things that he must be kept out of sight of his sovereign, save during those daily intervals of delight in which Dick visited him in his house beside the butcher's shop, yet his lord was in the same vessel with him, at no great distance from him, and bound with him for the one destination. He knew that he and Dick were traversing the one trail.

And sure enough the morning came at length, after all their shared divagations since the night of meeting beside the Peace River trail, when Jan stood beside his lord again, under the open sky and on the steamer's boat-deck, watching the rapidly nearing shores of England.

Many pictures were passing through Jan's mind; some inspired by memory of the tense strenuous life he had left behind him in the north-land; but a larger number having for background and subjects scenes that he remembered in his old life in Sussex-by-the-Sea.

The steamer was in yellow tidal waters now, with land close in all about her. As Jan reached the open deck, he had drawn in first one and then another and another, long, tremulous, deep breaths which, passing through the

infinitely delicate test-tubes of his wonderful nostrils, recorded in his brain impressions more vivid and accurate than any that vision could supply to him.

In this air, incalculably more soft and humid than any he had breathed for many a long day, were subtly distinctive qualities that were quite easily recognized by Jan. Well he knew now the meaning of this voyaging. Well he knew that this was England. It was this knowledge made him lift his muzzle and touch Dick's left hand with his tongue. The other hand held binoculars through which Dick was gazing fixedly at the line of wharfs they were approaching.

"Well, old chap," said he, in answer to the meaning touch. "You know all about it, eh? I believe you do, begad; I quite believe you do. Well, see if you can understand this: On the wharf there, where we shall be in a few minutes, there's old Finn, your sire, waiting; and the Pater and the Master, and—and there's Betty, Jan, boy; there's sweet Betty standing there; and she's waiting for you and me. She's waiting there for us, Jan, boy; and we're never goin' away from her again, old chap—never, so long as ever we live."

And if Jan did not understand it all just then, he did very soon afterwards; when he felt Betty Murdoch's arms about his neck, and lordly grey old Finn was sniffing and nuzzling friendly-wise about his flanks.

Jan fully understood then that after all his far wanderings, he had at the last of it come home.

THE END